



Class PZ 3

Book A 342

Copyright N^o M

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT

My Land. My Country.
My Home.

221
1961

By
Ad. Albright

Albany, N. Y.

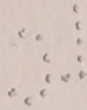
1915

PZ 3
.A342
M

COPYRIGHT, 1915
BY
A. ALBRIGHT

PUBLISHED BY
C. F. WILLIAMS & SON
PUBLISHERS FOR A. ALBRIGHT

All rights reserved, including
translation into foreign
languages



8.35
MAR 18 1915

©CL A398027

no,

new mar. 22 '15.

To

*The women who have helped men to be
what God intended them to be, to your mother
and to mine.*

CHAPTER I

A morning in late September.

All the day before the rain had fallen; not swiftly, not slowly, just easily; not warm, not cold, just cool. The dry and parched earth drank it in gratefully, and in graceful acknowledgment the withered blades of grass, that had lain so long under the rays of a scorching sun, now began to fill and unroll and put on a darker and richer shade of green. Quietly, persistently the rain had continued to descend until the whole earth had begun to take on a very damp and moist appearance.

The leaves hung heavily down from the trees and dripped, dripped continually: the cool, freshening rain-drops had stolen quietly into the deep foliage wetting the twigs from which the dripping leaves hung heavily, stole in on the branches and larger limbs, and then trickled softly down the great rugged trunks of the silent trees, and, one moving silently in and among these still sentinels of the woods, could almost hear the deep sighs of relief that went up from the souls of these stately occupants; while, at their massive feet, the little late wild flowers took on new life and beauty.

So all the world had gone to rest soothed by the sound of the gentle raindrops and greatly refreshed by their rich moisture.

All day the wind had blown gently from the south bearing upon its kindly bosom the greatly longed for rain; and when all the world had retired to rest, it was with a

silent and perfect satisfaction, and the contented feeling that a long and much needed rainy season was at hand.

Now, during the silent hours of the night, when all were sleeping, and no one seeming on watch, a little wind-sprite from another quarter had risen, and impishly tried his puny strength against the steadily blowing south wind; but, upon meeting with a very damp rebuff, turned and hurried away to some of his fellow spirits, shaking off the raindrops from his tiny wings in his flight: then, quickly gathering help from his fellows, returned to do battle in the dark: and so for a time the friendly encounter continued: sometimes the little mischievous spirits of the west and north winds would gambol freely over the disputed ground, then the good mother south wind with her spreading wet cloak would put them all to a hurried flight shaking her wet drops over them as they scurried away through the trees.

Sometime later, upon one of their returns from such a flight, they had found no one on hand to do them battle, for the good south wind, now having accomplished that for which she had come, had silently folded her wet mantle about her and departed to the land from whence she came, leaving in her trail all sweetness and refreshing, so the little northwest wind now finding no resistance, in sportive glee had puffed and blown until the heavy cloud banks becoming much disturbed, ceased to drop down dampness and moisture, and with a stately dignity had folded their great heavy robes about them, and like an army striking camp, shouldered their tents and silently marched away to the south-land leaving a few drifting clouds scattered across the heavens, as it were, to cover their retreat.

And so this September morning.

The sun rising over the eastern horizon had shot his slanting golden rays in between the leaves upon millions of raindrops upon leaf and blade and twig until the earth looked as if covered with a robe of most beautiful jewels, and the eye was almost dazzled by the sparkling display. The wind still continued to blow lightly and yet with an elasticity that was irresistible, which, filling the lungs and throat, created a feeling as of new wine being poured into the veins; a wine that seemed to hold in it all the virtues of life itself, until the mere joy of being alive and living filled the whole being with a most delicious rapture that was closely allied to pain.

Across the clear pale blue of the Heavens a few fleecy clouds floated like wisps of rare lace, in pattern and delicacy so exquisite that mortal hand could not copy or reproduce; for true it is, that, like the mystery of the Divine Birth, there are and will be, so long as time shall last, things and acts that the Great Creator hath reserved to Himself, although the sacriligious hands of man, and often those who profess the Divine right of wearing the Ecclesiastical robes, have, like an impish and sometimes malicious school boy, many times endeavored to thrust aside the veil that hangs between the seen and unseen, the known and unknown, that he might thus daringly and almost defiantly enter even the Holy of Holies, seemingly in open defiance, despite the injunction, thus far shalt thou go and no farther; and still God is patient, and long suffering, and merciful, until at times we are constrained to cry out, but with a different feeling and meaning, How long, Oh, Lord, how long wilt

Thou continue to be patient with Thy wilfully blinded and persistently erring children?

Up from the wet earth, influenced by the rays of the rising sun, which shot its slanting golden rays through countless leaves and branches, rose an almost imperceptible mist, like, as it were, incense; token of the prayers of a thankful people who worshipped and adored in silence and in truth.

A black and white woodpecker whirred across an open glade, sounding his rich musical guitar, and all became silent. The clear resilient air seemed to hold all in a flexible silence, a silence infinitely more felt than could be understood, causing the heart to beat more quickly and the pulses to throb more rapidly, as if with expectancy: suddenly, from out of the leafy depths of the woods—Amelie—o—ree—e—e—, a little belated wood robin, that had been beguiled into lingering after his mate had departed, feeling the expectancy in the air, poured forth his limpid call for his departed mate; like a thread of purest silver it floated out over the wonderful stillness: then a hush but no reply.

The light breeze floated through the branches like the lingering notes of an Æolian harp, and, listening now with a fierce intensity, one could almost catch the notes of some Divine harmony. The maples reared their stately, beautiful heads in the clear golden sunlight, a mass of pure, pale, yellow gold. The beeches, clothed in robes of delicate brown, and the dark green of the fir trees, made a combination and harmony of color mortal hand could not paint; while at their feet in the foreground the scarlet sumach flung out his feathery banner.

About a mile away to the west the little village of

Bentwell nestled at the foot of the wooded hills of Bentberg, so called for their bent or circular form. The forests that covered their mighty breasts, after an early and hard frost, were now one riotous mass of gorgeous coloring of green and gold and scarlet and brown; a wonderful combination, which flooded by the golden light of this perfect September morning, thrilled the whole being with a feeling that was very near to awe; and it seemed that some marvelous vision had been unfolded to mortal eyes.

Suddenly, from out the mysteriously thrilling silence there floated one startlingly beautiful tone.

Oh! Listen!

Surely that was not a mortal voice!

Far above the living pulsing silence, pealed out that single soprano note, more wonderfully beautiful than ever yet came from woman's throat, and lay upon the bosom of the elastic air like the flight of some wondrously beautiful bird.

Involuntarily the hands clench, the throat contracts and the breast heaves with a painful pressure. The breath ceases; waiting, while all about the living air seemed to vibrate and thrill with the wonderful melody.

What was it? Whence did it come?

Involuntarily the eyes turn from side to side, looking, seeking, — the ear strains, listening, listening, — looking, listening, seeking, — for what?

Would it come again or was it simply a delusion called up by the effect of the morning, the sun, the gorgeous coloring? An hallucination caused by the life and vitality of that wonderful breath of the morning, the lambent air, which flooded the whole being with its intoxicating power?

The pulses throbbed and beat upon the temples like great hammers. The throat ached, the tension grew. Would it not come again? Had it ceased almost at its birth? No, no, it could not be! and yet it could not have been mortal.

Listen, listen.

The murmur of the winds in the trees.

Amelie—o—ree—e—e— the little wood robin; then, silence.

The clenched hands loose, the throat relaxes, the breath returns, but the heart feels a loss. The loss as of something that had died at its birth—Oh! Listen! there it comes again! that wondrously beautiful tone, and others—Oh! Listen! there are words! it must be mortal! Listen! Listen! those marvelous tones! those wonderful words! They burn themselves into the brain like living fire! They stand forth in the radiant sunlight with a terribly significant meaning. And yet one cannot understand And the question,—what does it mean? What can it mean?

The beautiful morning—the golden sunlight—the gorgeous scene—the wonderful silence—the Heavenly peace, and now over all this marvelous voice.

Is it an angelic messenger come to earth? Listen! Listen! Those words!

High above the breathless world as from a living trumpet—like the unerring flight of a bird—

“To Thy Holy, To Thy Holy care elected,”
the voice sunk down through that grand cadence with an appeal that was heartrending; and the eyes begin to smart and fill with tears. Then, like a prayer, the voice began to ascend with that grand supplication—

“Saviour, let me be protected on judgment day!”

The Inflammatus! The wonderful Inflammatus!

Unconsciously one leans forward and breathlessly listens, firmly expecting some invisible choir to respond with that superbly beautiful minor passage that seems to contain within itself all the misery of a broken and ruined life.

“On the dreadful Judgment Day, On the dreadful Judgment Day.

On the dreadful Judgment Day, The Judgment, The Judgment Day,”

But only silence.

Then from out that living, suffering, listening stillness, for all the world seemed to be listening now, stole again that voice of unearthly sweetness like a golden throated flute.

“Through the loved Redeemer’s dying,”

The tears overflow and roll unheeded down the cheek as we listen again for the invisible choir, but the voice alone takes up the strain —

“Let me fondly still relying ”

then again —

“Let me fondly still relying;

For Thy grace and mercy pray.”

on, on, up, up, through all those brilliant intricacies it threaded its way with a perfection and beauty of tone that was almost appalling, while the throat of the listener aches and aches with an unknown agony; and one listening must

needs sob out, through the dreadful unreality of it all, — What is it? What is it? What does it mean?

A moment of deepest silence, laden with mystery, then — Ugh! Horrible! Horrible! A string of curses, deep, blasphemous, loathsome: can this be the bright September morning when all the earth seemed about to uplift its thousand golden voices in one mighty jubilant pean of thanksgiving to a Divine Creator? When it seemed impossible that anything evil or unclean could intrude at what seemed to be the very Gate of Heaven itself; and now, oath upon oath, blasphemy upon blasphemy, surprise upon surprise. We ask again, but with far different feeling and meaning, — What does it all mean? What can it mean?

“ — — — Alfred, what in — — do you mean by stoppin’ there and yellin’ your — — head off when I — — by the — — now you git along or I’ll break every — — bone in your — — body!”

Then followed a string of oaths unfit for the ears to hear.

Very quickly was heard the light sound of footfalls down the wet forest path and then out from the shadows and golden patches of the glade there came, with hurried steps, a boy.

What pen can picture the look of sick horror upon the childish face? It was incredible. The childish mouth quivered and the face twitched with some inconceivable inward horror and agony while the slight boyish frame shook from head to foot as when a lash is applied.

With hurried, nervous step, half run, he came out in the clear light of the day; was he Alfred? the wonderful voice?

No, it was not possible for that small childish frame to carry that almost Divinely melodious voice; it was almost unthinkable; and yet —

Ugh! That other voice, it was not a voice, 'twas rather some demon from the black abyss of hell itself let loose and scattering foulness in all his path.

But this boy was about twelve years of age, slender and boyish, flexible in movement, despite his present nervous agitation, which gave added impression of considerable strength.

The head which was finely set up upon a round, boyish throat and neck, and splendidly shaped, was covered with a mass of wavy, golden brown hair, which, falling in half curling and waving masses over his forehead, where it had escaped from the worn hat which was pressed back from his face, seemed to catch all the golden gleam of the sun, as if it had found its natural home there. His face was slightly oval in shape with a beautifully half-rounded half-pointed chin, while the forehead was but medium high and broad; his mouth, though now quivering and distorted with inward emotion, was of fine shape and showed an unusual degree of character, remarkable in one so young; but it was in the eyes that the most remarkable feature of the face was centered; they were extremely large and full and of a gray color with a strange gleam of gold in their depths, and that depth, who can describe it? and now that he was laboring under much excitement there showed a glint of green in them, or was it only the reflection of the sunlight on the green leaves of the oak under which he was passing? truly they were the most wonderful eyes ever seen and can be likened to nothing less than twin stars, and at this time

being dilated to their fullest, with wide open lids, they appeared almost unearthly.

The brows were medium heavy, a little darker than the hair, and like the eyes were set far apart, showing a very great intelligence; the ears, small, were exquisitely shaped and set close to the head, being half hidden by the hair, which was worn in a boyish, half childish fashion, half long; his hands and feet, bared and uncovered by his simple homely garments, were almost perfect in size and shape. Indeed, under happier circumstances this boy would have graced the halls of the Gods, as did Ganymede of old, except that where Ganymede was dark like an Egyptian, this boy was fair with a rich golden fairness. The smooth skin of the face, without spot or blemish, was tanned by the sun and wind and so had taken on the rich glow of a luscious peach hanging against the wall and ripening with its red cheek to the sun.

With a light elastic step, that was now half run, he continued on along the path where it took its way beside a little brook; indeed, he went almost like a young Indian, half leaning forward and going considerably on the ball of the foot, which upbore him like a fine steel spring.

In gayer moments, when going down this path, he often amused himself by springing back and forth across the little brook in simple excess of spirits; but this morning he proceeded on his way, nor turned to the right or left. At other times he had gone, boy fashion, tossing his hat in the air and, as only a boy can, whistling and singing from sheer excess of joy. Now a sober deadly silence seemed to enfold him with its awful chill.

Coming to an old rail fence, that seemed the only

obstacle in the way of the long path, he put his hands on the top rail, after a short approaching run, and leaped over as lightly as a bird and coming upon his feet ran now, swiftly as a swallow skims along, the remaining distance to the home of the neighboring farmer, whither he had been dispatched upon some errand.

Farmer James Beaton came out from his woodshed door, which was the entrance to the rear part of the house, scolding as he came; scolding because old Betty, his fine brood mare, had gotten tangled up in her stall, which necessitated the calling of all hands to help right "the old lady," as he was wont to call her; which accident had delayed breakfast, so he scolded about that. And now he was just getting out to begin his day's work, "a whole hour behind time," so he scolded about that; but no one minded much when Farmer Jim, as he was best known, scolded; in fact, most everyone rather enjoyed hearing Farmer Jim scold, for he was never known to have become seriously angry in all his life; even Old Shep, his faithful old sheep dog, who now came sauntering along behind him, lifted up his head and emitted a prolonged yawn which ended in a very weary sounding y-o-w-l. "See here, you Shep! You shet your head; don't you be makin' fun of me or I'll send you back to the house!" But Shep merely trotted on ahead pricking up his ears as he went.

"What now! Cats again! You'd better let them cats alone or mother'll take it out of your old hide!" as Shep darted around the corner of the house going toward the barn and barking as he went.

"Hear, you old fool dog," said Farmer Jim as he too turned the corner and saw the old dog running toward the barn, "W'at's the matter with you anyway?"

Down under the great spreading elm tree, that stood at the foot of the dooryard, stood an ancient horseblock that had been placed there years ago by Farmer Jim's father.

It was an odd growth found in the neighboring woods that had made a very servicable stepping place and, being extremely ornamental, had never been removed, although more modern and fashionable horseblocks had been in use for some time.

Straight for the old horseblock the old dog trotted, barking and wagging his tail as he went.

"Here you, Shep; what the —" and then he stopped short as he came around the great tree to the road; for there, crouching upon the low step of the great stump, sat a little, forlorn figure with great staring gray eyes, still panting from his long run across the wet meadow path.

The old dog laid his heavy muzzle on the childish knee and turned his great brown eyes up to the little white face of the boy he loved so well, for he and the boy were old friends, and now the boy was in trouble and the old dog knew it.

The slender boyish arms went around the shaggy neck of the dog and for a moment all three remained motionless; then —

"Why! Alfred, boy!" exclaimed Farmer Jim.

"Yes, Mr. Beaton —," gasped the boy, "that is — good morning — a — Mr. Beaton, — a — I guess I must have run, a — maybe, too fast," he choked rather breathlessly, then

tried to utter a little short laugh, which was a most miserable failure.

"But, Alfred!" said Farmer Jim, as he looked sharply into the haggard face of the child before him and now saw the drawn lines and white circles around the childish mouth. Then dropping his great strong hand on the frail little shoulder he said, "Alfred, boy, what is it? What —"

"Nothing, Mr. Beaton," stammered the boy. "Nothing," and Farmer Jim saw how the childish throat choked and scraped as he tried to bring himself under control, and how the delicate, childish hands clenched themselves in the shaggy hair of old Shep's beautiful collar, as if he were summoning all his strength to his aid. "But, but, my, my, my father, he — a, he sent me over to get, to get some corn; yes, that's it, some corn; he, he spoke to you about it?" and oh, the sickly smile that tried to come over that wan little face as the boy made another ghastly attempt to hide his emotion.

"Why, yes," said Farmer Jim, "yes, of course, but you can't carry it, no! no!" as the boy tried to protest; "no! no! I'm going to drive Tom over to the village about ten o'clock and I'll bring it with me."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Beaton!" said the boy eagerly, "yes I can." And he spoke quickly now as Farmer Jim began to shake his head disapprovingly. "You see, you see I'm real strong; oh, yes, I am, and you see he, he, my father wouldn't like it if I came back without it, you see" — and in his eagerness the boy had risen and laid his small boyish hands upon the great strong hand of the man, and Farmer Jim, looking down, prepared to make a final refusal, met those wonderful gray eyes looking up into his with a mute appeal

that left him absolutely powerless to follow even his own better judgment.

For a moment they stood thus, the mild blue eyes of the great strong man looking down into the great gray eyes of the boy, and the man became as wax in the hands of the child; only a moment, then Farmer Jim turned abruptly toward the corncrib and said something under his breath, no matter, gentle reader, what, only it wouldn't look well in print, and coming from such a man as Farmer Jim it would sound a great deal worse.

"I'll hold the sack for you, sir," said the boy, trotting along side now, with the old dog running on ahead.

"You'll go right up to the house and get a big fried cake, sir! Guess I know what boys of your size need; Henry'll hold the sack," said Farmer Jim gruffly, or at least as gruffly as he could.

"But I've had my breakfast, and, and really I couldn't," stammered the boy, and then Farmer Jim said some more things.

Reaching the corncrib the corn was soon sacked and as they came out of the open door Farmer Jim lifted the heavy sack of corn and laid it upon the small slender shoulders of the boy very carefully, half expecting to see him go down under the burden.

Dear reader, have you ever come upon some slender stemmed plant, or sapling, and in idle playfulness laid a weight upon it just to see it sway and bend from side to side as if it would free itself from the hateful burden? Well, so this slender childish form swayed and bent from side to side for a moment, then gradually straightened and gaining his poise the boy moved off with his burden.

A few minutes later, when he was well along on his way, good Mrs. Beaton came down toward the sheep pen where were a couple of orphaned lambs which she was bringing up, as they say, by hand, and happening to look down over the meadows and distant glowing woods when her eyes caught sight of the moving figure of the heavily laden boy.

Dropping the basin of warm milk that she carried in her hand she hurried toward the barn calling as she went, "Jim! Jim Beaton! Jim!"

"Yes, mother," said Farmer Jim, coming toward her from the corncrib. "What is it?"

"Look yonder!" said she, pointing excitedly in the direction of the boy. "What's that going over the meadow?"

"Oh," said he quietly, "that's Alfred Raymond."

"Alfred Raymond! and what on earth's the child got on his shoulder?" said she.

"A sack of corn." Farmer Jim spoke as quietly as he could, for he too was more moved than he cared to show.

"A sack of corn!" cried she shrilly, "Jim Beaton! and do you mean to tell me that you let that child lug that sack of corn all the way home, and you planning to drive over to the village? Here!—" and Mary Beaton, her face flushed, her eyes flashing, started as if to follow the boy and call him, when her husband laid his hand on her shoulder, saying kindly, "Easy mother, easy."

"But, Jim!" protested she, "that child!"

"Yes, mother," said he, "I reckon I feel pretty much the same's you do, but I mistrust strongly John's drinkin' "

agin, and I wanted to bring it over, but the little shaver was so distressed, and 'twould only make a bad matter worse, en so I had to let him go." And Farmer Jim dropped his head as a dark flush mounted to his face.

Mary Beaton turned away the tears streaming down her sweet comely face as the iron entered deeply into her soul, for hers was a childless home, and she and Jim Beaton loved this child with all the wealth of their great souls, and yet, in the face of this they were compelled to stand, absolutely powerless and watch a childhood slain, an early youth foully murdered, and shuddered as they looked forward and wondered what the coming years would bring.

Meanwhile the panting, overladen boy staggered along his way, his slender body bending slowly lower and lower, his breath beginning to come in long gasping sobs; the damp moisture covered his face and neck and the wet hair clung to the skin wherever it chanced to touch. And now the fear began to grow upon him that he would not reach the rail fence before he would be compelled to let down his load. And if once he let it down how would he ever be able to lift it up again? Vainly he looked around for some friendly stone or stump. Nothing. The load was becoming heavier with every step.

Clenching his teeth, as the breath hissed in through them to the painfully aching throat and chest, he wrenched his little aching back into a more upright position and hurried forward. He was almost there. Could he reach it? Yes, he could see the top rail now quite clearly. One more wrench upward. Hurry, hurry, yes, here is the fence; now slowly, carefully, turn around and bend down so as to lift the bottom of the bag up, there, back a little, slowly, care-

fully, let down, — did it miss? Yes, and he must try again — No, it did not! Easy, there, it rests on the friendly rail, as carefully balancing it the almost exhausted boy, crouching, stepped out from underneath; but, oh, the agony of the reaction. Almost it seemed as if a hundred knives were plunged in that little quivering back all at once, and for a moment everything began to grow dark about him; but gripping the sack with a firm hold he braced himself against the fence, and soon the blood resuming its natural course the air began to clear and the intense pain and nausea soon abated. After a little he felt much better; the trouble was the boy had not been able to get his second wind, and a very few feet more would have laid him out insensible and possibly dangerously injured.

For a few minutes he stood there, the crushed shoulders and chest expanding under their new found freedom, drawing in great draughts of the freshly cool and sweetly invigorating air. The crushing load, which so shortly before had threatened to bring ruin and confusion, had served to relax the tension on the childish mind and brain, and the extreme overexertion caused the rich young blood to go bounding freely through the young body, bringing in its train a brighter and more hopeful outlook, so that the boy now began to look out upon the day with a more cheerful heart.

The beautiful gray eyes glowed and sparkled with a rich purplish light and at every turn of the head the golden glow from their wondrous depths seemed to burn with an almost unquenchable fire as they caught the glancing rays of the rising sun. The damp, curling hair clung to the moist skin with a loving carressing touch, while the rich red blood

coursing now freely showed through the clear, sun-tanned skin, giving a most exquisite coloring to the face.

The lips, freed from the unnatural tension that had bound them when he first came into view, were red as the heart of a pomegranate and most bewitchingly curved, and now parted, showed the white even teeth back of them. Altogether it was a face of more than ordinary beauty.

After his short refreshing rest, with hope beginning a new song in his heart, for true now as when it was first said is the saying that, "Hope springs eternal in the heart," he carefully balanced the sack of corn upon the fence while he climbed over, being cautious to not let the sack slip from its place; for well he knew that once it should come to the ground he could not possibly lift it up again.

Upon getting safely over to the other side he slowly worked the heavy sack toward him until only a small part of it rested on the top rail, then turning round he lifted the heavy end with his two slender hands and arms as high as he could, and bending slightly down he began to work his way backward under the heavy grain; then letting it down carefully, he adjusted it as best he could, until, becoming satisfied, he slowly lifted himself straight and the heavy load swung clear of the fence.

For a moment he stood, straight as a young sapling, then drawing in a deep, full breath he started off on the remainder of his journey, all uncertainty gone, for he had gotten his second wind; and now nothing daunted he went with a new resolution and courage. And the question arises, how will it be in the battle of life? Will he stand thus when the fierce storms of opposition and all their accompanying train beset him as firmly as he does now? And,

having gotten his strong second wind, will he step out as courageously and fearlessly as he does now?

On, up along the path that ran adjoining the little singing brook, the boy pursued his sturdy way, turning at length off to the left where it led through the woods through which he had come singing so short a time back. Soon the path emerged from the wood upon the south side and continued alongside almost until it reached some small out-buildings adjoining a small barn. Coming around these he made his way to the open barn door, where, with a sigh of relief, he let the sack slip from his shoulder to the floor with a dull thud; a man who was busied with the horse in an adjoining stall came through a small door into the main barn; he might have been forty years of age, large, strongly built and dark, as could be seen as he came forward toward the door where the boy had stopped but a moment.

“Well, d’you get back? Seems to me y’wuz gone a —— of a while.”

The boy looked down but made no reply.

One look into the face of the man and the whole miserable story was told; the puffed cheeks, the thick lips, the bleared eyes, by one word; rum. As the boy remained standing motionless, he continued, “You git to work in that garden.” Then, as the boy started off, he called after him, “Nuther thing, you won’t have anything t’do with that —— pepogram down t’church; hear me?”

The boy stopped short and wheeled as if shot. The great gray eyes were distended to their fullest extent. The boyish face, from which every vestige of color had fled, was now gray like ashes and took on a pinched and drawn look as if untold years with all their agony had suddenly rolled

across it leaving it looking wan and old. The dry stiffening lips opened as if to reply as the hands unconsciously lifted in mute appeal.

“Shut yer —— mouth!” came the brutal reply to that silent agonized appeal. “’Fyou’n that —— pack at the meetin’ house think you can fool me any more yer —— mistaken, ’ve had all I’m goin’ t’ ’v your —— yellin’ ’n screechin’ around here, no more ’v it fer me! You’ll git t’work ’n help me. G’wan en shut yer head, ’n git that work done.” To which was added a string of bitter, stinging oaths.

With widely staring, unseeing eyes, the boy turned and half stumbled toward the garden, which lay a short distance from the small house near by. Making his way quietly through the little gate he sunk down to the work before him. Through his numbed brain the full import of those horribly cruel words gradually settled, and as their full meaning was borne in upon his dulled senses his soul sickened with an awful dread. What! Not sing in the great concert? Him of whom so much was expected? Who had looked forward so eagerly? Who had worked so hard? Who had been so happy and joyous in expectation? When not even stinging curses, sneers, and brutal unkindnesses could quench his bright youthful ardor, and most of all, that golden nightingale in his throat. How often after just such lashings as he had received this morning, had he stolen away to some secluded nook, and when assured that no one was in hearing, he had felt that sweet pain in his throat; that happy ache in his little chest, and, lifting his face to the heavens above him, those liquid tones that must have rivalled those of even the angels themselves came rolling forth, and would

not be quenched. And all the world was bright and full of radiance again; for youth is ever full of hope and will not remain cast down forever.

John Raymond had always been unkind to this boy, why, only himself knew; but then he, Alfred, had not cared much, for was there not mother? And so long as mother was there, what did all else matter; and, too, the little sisters. Of course father was often like that and at times it was so hard, but there was always the beautiful bird in his throat, and again mother, so the rest did not matter.

But this was different. Never before had his father forbidden him to sing. The cruel, brutal words beat upon his little weary brain with terrible meaning. The little childish frame shrunk together as if suddenly scorched with a fierce resistless flame of bitter fire that had left everything blackened and desolate in its wake. The great gray eyes, dulled and leaden now, looked down unseeing while the weary hands mechanically performed their task. All about seemed dark. No sun, no sky, no brightness. Over him had settled a pall of horrible blackness and desolation. And the pity of it was that this child, for he was yet scarcely more than a child, was forced to swallow this bitterest of cups to the very dregs, alone.

Once or twice a woman had come to the house door and looked toward the garden, but seeing the boy so intent upon his work had returned to her own household duties. Knowing the condition her husband was in and thinking that doubtless the boy had been given some allotted work to do, was anxious to finish; particularly as when once a little golden haired tot of about two and one-half years of age, came trotting to the door and in her baby piping voice had

called, "Aw-fwed," but receiving no reply, had trotted back to the mother saying, "Aw-fwed bizzy;" she had not disturbed him; and so the mother remained in ignorance of the affair.

Later she came again to the door and gazing intently at the crouching figure she called, "Boy, come now, it is time to get ready for school." And as he had always been prompt and obedient, she did not wait for him to respond, but returned to prepare his lunch, so did not notice that for the first time, the cheery, "yes, mother," failed to greet her.

Slowly the boy lifted his heavily hanging head and looked around with dull unseeing eyes. Years seemed to have rolled over him since he had turned in at the barn door with his heavily laden shoulders and happy singing heart, leaving him feeling old and weary and worn. Mechanically he brushed the dirt from his hands and clothing and made his way to the little wooden wash-bench around the corner of the house. In the same dull, heavy way, he washed his hands and face, bathed his feet and went inside and up the stair to his little room. Taking off his working clothes, and as he had always been taught, hung them up in their place, put on his school suit, which was his second best, then covered his feet with his shoes and stockings. In the same dull, heavy way he descended the stairs.

Margaret Raymond noticed that the boy had gone quietly up to his own room, but knowing as she did, that her husband, being under the influence of liquor, would, as he had done so often before, have some detestable thing to say or do to the boy, and while she looked forward with dread to the day when a breach must come, yet felt safe in

the belief that on account of the tender years of the boy such a day was yet far distant; and so, believing silence to be the best means of dealing with the threatening and daily growing menace, had refrained from speaking openly. Now she waited with some degree of foreboding as she heard his heavy footsteps descending the stair; and as he came toward her, his back being to the light, she did not at first see his face plainly; but her quick, loving eye took in at a glance his disordered hair, and by way of opening conversation, said in her sweet cheerful way, "Why, Boy! You've forgotten to comb your hair!"

Alfred put his hand to the bright, golden mass in a dazed, stupid way, as his mother hurriedly brought the comb and began to straighten out the tangled locks. As her hand touched his face she felt the cold, almost clammy, feeling as of something dead, and with a start of surprise she turned his face to the light and for the first time saw the wan, haggared look that rested there; the look of dull misery that dwelt in those wonderful eyes.

"Alfred! Boy! What is it?" she exclaimed. "Are you sick? What has happened?"

She saw with sharp agony the painful effort the boy made to reply. The rough scraping of the throat at the words, "No, mother." Which seemed to almost choke him.

"He, he did not strike you?" she cried sharply, then caught her breath as she saw a dull angry red steal up over the ashen-gray features, and a red mist seemed to float before her eyes for a moment; but the boy shook his head.

"Then what is it? Tell mother." Anxiously she waited as the beautiful golden head dropped against her arm

for a moment. Then in choking, broken fragments, "He —— he said —— he —— said ——"

"Yes, Boy, what did he say?" and the arm of the woman went around the slender shoulders of the deathly quiet boy.

"He —— said ——" went on the dull monotonous voice, "he —— said —— that —— I ——" There was a long pause, yet she waited. "—— that —— I could not sing at the festival."

"Could not!" Her voice rang out shrilly. "Could not sing at the festival?" But he was going on in a whisper now, and she must stoop low to hear the choking, broken words that betokened a child heart breaking.

"He said —— I could not —— and —— you know ——" Again that awful choking sound. "—— you —— know —— what —— that —— means."

Margaret Raymond clasped that broken-hearted boy to her in a fierce embrace. Her head came up like a tigress at bay ready to do battle for her young. Her brown eyes blazed with a deadly light. Never before had she been so aroused. Her nostrils quivered and dilated as the color slowly receded from her face, leaving it colorless as marble. One moment she stood thus, glorious defiance in every line of her splendid body, in every feature of her rigid face; then as she gazed about her, the helplessness of her situation bore down upon her with terrible force.

The silence was unbroken save for the prattle of the two little baby girls in an inner room.

At the entrance of one of our beautiful parks stands a magnificent group in bronze. The deadly ball of the hunter has found the heart of the lioness mother. Two baby cubs

are tumbling in sportive glee over the dead body, while towering over that pathetically silent form stands the lion. Rage, defiance, revenge, perfect helplessness blended in the most pathetic picture ever looked upon by mortal eye. And at that moment Margaret Raymond understood as she had never understood before.

Slowly her arms unclasped them from the boy. Slowly the rigidity died out of her body, and reaching down, she placed his lunch box in his hand and set his hat upon his head. Mechanically she pushed him toward the door.

Just before he passed through she put her arm around his neck and pressed his little cold face to hers. She did not attempt to kiss him. She held him thus for a minute, then, unconsciously, the words, "Mother will find a way," fell from her lips as if spoken by some other voice; then she released him and he passed out, into his first Gethsemane.

CHAPTER II

John Raymond and Margaret Rathmore were children of Quaker parentage; twelve years before the opening of this story they had moved to their present home near the village of Bentwell from a distant part of the country, the boy Alfred being a baby at that time.

John had been a surly, morose sort of a fellow and seemed to take an unnatural dislike to the beautiful child; and the more the people of the little community learned to love the gentle little fellow, the more his father seemed to dislike him until at times that dislike seemed to grow into an almost unnatural hatred.

During the first few years of their residence in this place he had not shown his disposition toward the child so openly, but frequent trips made to the village tavern had soon put him in an indifferent mood to the opinion of the good people of the community although he still stood a little in awe of Farmer Jim Beaton and particularly of his wife, for good Mary Beaton was not one who was slow to speak her mind, particularly where the boy Alfred Raymond was concerned, for very shortly after John and Margaret Raymond had gotten settled in their new home she was driving old Betty, who was young Betty then, to the village, and chanced to come along just as Margaret Raymond came into her front yard with her babe in her arms.

Now if there was anything that would catch Mary Beaton's heart and soul, it was a baby, and that no little lives came to bless the big old Beaton house, only intensified

her great love for children; so she drove right up to the gate and climbing out of her wagon, tied her horse to the fence and walked in. Half way up the path she came face to face with a beautiful, brown haired, brown eyed woman, dressed in a neat print house dress, immaculately clean, and tastefully made, carrying in her arms a babe of about ten months of age. With a sweet smile upon her comely face, Mary Beaton went up to the stranger, and, holding out her hand, said, with all the frankness of her splendid nature, "I am Mrs. Beaton. I have wanted to meet you, and when I saw you here with that blessed baby, why I couldn't stand to wait any longer."

"And I am Margaret Raymond," said the stranger, as she took the warmly proffered hand of her neighbor. "Will you not come in?" Her manner, simple, unaffected, was graciousness itself.

"No, thank you," said her caller, "Jim wants some fixings from the store and I wanted to see your baby."

"Will you not sit here then?" said her hostess, motioning to a low garden seat.

"I will; thank you," said Mary Beaton, seating herself, "but please mayn't I hold your baby just a little?" reaching out her arms as she spoke.

Margaret Raymond looked into the face of the older woman, and seeing the yearning, the longing expressed there, read the soul of the woman before her; all of its heartaches, all of its longing, all of its disappointment and, without a word, laid the smiling child into her arms.

For a moment Mary Beaton sat as if spellbound. Up to the present she had not looked closely at the child, being satisfied that a child was there, but had been taking more

notice of the mother, but now, as she gazed down into that beautiful baby face, and into those deep, almost fathomless gray eyes, she felt almost as if she were in some other sphere of life. For some moments she did not move, then, with a quick intake of her breath, she raised the little form in her motherly arms, bowing her head until her face rested against the velvety cheek of the child. As she felt that little pulsing body pressed against her heart, and that little soft baby cheek pressed against her own, her eyes filled with hot, burning tears, and Margaret Raymond, looking at that bowed head and those tears, saw and understood.

The older woman after a few moments handed the child back to his mother, but she made no move to kiss him; and now the tears came into the eyes of the younger woman, as Mary Beaton leaned forward, and putting her two hands together, lifted the little cherubic hand that was outstretched to her, first touching it to her forehead, then left a kiss upon it light as a flake of snow.

Thus did Margaret Raymond and Mary Beaton meet, and the silent bond then formed was never broken. Thus did Mary Beaton and the boy Alfred Raymond meet, and the love she bore him never dimmed this side of the grave.

Years passed on; the toddling child, then the little boy, then the school-boy. That his father bore no love toward him did not seem to affect him. In some things he was a strange child. Those who cared not for him he did not care for. His mother was always first, in fact, there were times when it would seem that she was almost God to him. For, in some ways, Margaret Raymond was a very strange woman. That she was a Christian would be hard to doubt; yet no one ever heard her take the sacred name upon her

lips. While she never attempted to teach the child aught of Holy Writ, in some indefinable manner the Divine Redeemer was an ever present fact, the Great God a Reality, and the Bible, a truth. Between the two the father's name was never mentioned. The father never discussed. That he had his mother was all sufficient for him. Strange? Yes, I agree with you. But remember, dear reader, that boys are strange things, and I know of but one thing that is more strange, and that is a mother. When you can fathom and analyze a mother, then I will agree to fathom and analyze a boy.

The wonderful fortitude displayed by his mother, as daily she bore the heavy burden imposed upon her by the dissipation of his father was to him a wonderful example and daily he grew more like her. Do not think that because of these things he was not like any average boy, for he was. When out from under the shadow that rested so heavily at times upon his young life he was just as bright and merry as any boy that ever lived. His great safety lay in the wonderful voice that very early developed, and an almost mechanical perfection of ear.

At a very early age he would catch a tune and sing or whistle it with an absolute perfection that was startling. And, innumerable almost, as were the times, when coming from the hands of his father, after having received as vitriolic an attack as a drunken man's malignant tongue could possibly administer, when it seemed as if his very soul had been flayed and scorched by the cowardly attack, he had escaped to the solitudes, and then the golden bird in his throat had beat and beat upon his heart, and he had only to lift his face to the heavens when forth would gush those

glorious tones that would not be suppressed and chase away every cloud and sorrow.

When his little sister was born, it seemed that the wonderful bird in his throat must burst its bonds and show itself to all the world, he was so happy. Would he ever forget that day? He did not think so; he had been at school, and all the way home, you see, there had been the boys who came part way his way home. Such running, such merry laughter, such games of leap-frog, such strife to see who could leap over the highest rail fence, and then the tumble he had received which had "just knocked the wind right out of him." Oh, how they had all laughed when it was all over and they said he "grunted so funny."

Then they had gone their way home and he had come on alone, and when he had reached the top of the little hill he had stopped, and then he had seen the little house where mother was; why, he could see way down the road, clear to Mr. Beaton's, and he was sure that that must be Shep going up the path from the barn to the house.

Then he looked again at the little house at the foot of the hill, and there came that little achy feeling in his throat, and he lifted up his little face and those lovely notes just came, "you couldn't help their coming, then you waited, for you know, when mother heard that, why, she just came out to the gate, and she waved her hand just like mothers do, you know; and then out would come some more of those lovely sounds. You just couldn't help it; you know, you felt so good inside; it just had to come out, for if it didn't you couldn't always tell what might happen, but out they'd come, and oh, you felt so good, and then you'd just grab your hat off with one hand and your dinner basket in the

other, and how you'd run, lickety cut, and if there was a spoon or a dish that rattled, why you'd just run harder than ever, for that made you feel better than ever, and when you got to the foot of the hill where you could see plain, then you could see that smile on mother's face, and you could hear her say, 'Boy, Boy, don't run so hard!' and you'd say, 'Sho, that wasn't running,' and mother'd put her hand out and push that hot hair back off from your face and oh, her hand felt so good."

Mothers of all lands and nations
Will you ever, ever learn,
How for you as for no other,
Boyish hearts so often yearn?

With a wordless, nameless longing,
That remains all unconfessed,
While the cares of life come thronging,
Still remain all unexpressed.

And e'en on thro years of manhood,
Till life's sun sets in the west,
At the last, 'tis then we would
Lay our heads on her dear breast.

But that day mother had not come out to the little gate as usual, so you called again; still no answer. That was strange, you could not understand. Then you started down the hill more slowly, there she was coming around the corner of the house now; what a hurry you had been in; why hadn't you waited; but, but, that wasn't mother, you could see now quite plain; that was Mrs. Beaton, and now she was waiting at the gate; you could not understand; of course you liked Mrs. Beaton, yes, next to mother you liked Mrs.

Beaton more than anybody else, but, but of course she wasn't mother and you were troubled, so you rushed up and almost forgot to speak as mother had shown you how, you were so anxious, but Mrs. Beaton, she just smiled just like she did —— but you couldn't wait, you wanted to know where mother was, and "why hadn't she come out? She had never failed to come before."

And then Mrs. Beaton had taken hold of your hand, and you went and sat down upon the garden seat, and she began to tell you a story; the story of a little boy —— and he lived all alone, that is with his father and mother, and he didn't have anybody to play with, that is, no little brother or sister; of course he sometimes came and played with an old dog named Shep, but then Shep he was only a dog, and you couldn't play with him like you could with a real little brother or sister for when you wanted to play hide and seek, why Shep wouldn't play seek, good; he'd always come before you was ready and hunted you up, and when you wanted to draw Shep in the cart 'twas such hard work to get him all in, for when you got him in in front he was coming out behind, and when you got him in behind he was beginning to spill out in front, and 'twas such hard work for a little boy; and when you got him all in, real good, and started to draw him around the yard, he just up and all rolls out, and then he jumps up and runs and barks, and goes on as if it was all a great big joke, and then this little boy he just sits down in the cart, and looks so tired, and so dirty, and so discouraged, and Mrs. Beaton says she knows that that little boy must wish that he had a little brother or sister to play with, for they wouldn't hunk up before he was ready, neither would they jump around and bark when he

wanted to draw them in the cart; and then Mrs. Beaton looked at you with such a funny little look in her eyes, and you felt, oh, you felt as if your breath was all gone, and you wanted to laugh, and you wanted to cry, both at the same time, and you couldn't do either, and then, somehow, I don't exactly know how 'twas, but somehow, the next thing you know you had your arms around her neck and she was holding you so tight,—and then she rose up and carried you way in the house, and way into mother's room, and there on the bed with mother, was the littlest, teeniest, weeniest baby you ever saw; and mother turned to you and held out her hand and said, "Boy, Boy," and then Mrs. Beaton took that little bit of a teeny, weeny baby up and you went and looked at it, and you didn't know what to say, and finally you said in a whisper, "Can I touch her?" And Mrs. Beaton put that little bit of a hand in yours and it just grabbed right hold of you by the thumb and it held so tight, and you had such a trembly feeling all over you; by and by you went over to the bed to mother, and you bent down and whispered in mother's ear, so low that even good Mrs. Beaton could not hear you, for you were just a boy, you know, "Wasn't God good, mother, to bring me a little sister? For that's just what I wanted."

Then you went out of doors and everything looked so different that you hardly knew it, and after a little while you remembered, there was one spot down in the woods, oh, it was such a queer, loney spot that no one knew of; you found it one day, quite accidentally, 'twas just like a — just like — yes, that was it, 'twas just like a church; you see you had those funny little shivery feelings, just like you have when you go into a church, and everything was so still, and

you didn't want to talk out loud, for if you did you'd disturb something; I don't know just exactly what it was, but you felt you musn't disturb it; so you slipped away quietly to that little hidden spot, and this time when you went in there came all over you such funny little prickery feelings; and you went and sat down by the big chestnut tree, and all at once the trees began to move and whisper, and you listened, oh, how you listened, just trying to hear what the trees were saying, but somehow you couldn't quite make out. And that wonderful bird that was in your throat, it kept so still, only once in a while you could feel it nestle up close, and once or twice you could just hear it croon, oh, so soft and low, like, oh, like a pigeon, and you felt as if you hardly dared to breathe, you wanted so to know what the trees were saying; and pretty soon a little finch came and sat on a little low limb, near by, and she looked at you with those little beady black eyes, and turned her pretty little head, oh, so many ways, just to see if you looked all right; and then she looked right straight at you, and you looked right straight back again, and pretty soon she said, in a little plaintive voice, "Ba——by, ba——by," and all the trees seemed whispering it all at once, and then that other bird woke and shook its wings, and all of a sudden you jumped right up onto your feet, and you couldn't keep still any longer, and as you rushed through the woods and out towards the house, out tumbled those beautiful notes, one upon another, run upon run, higher, higher, until it seemed they must reach the pearly gates themselves in their glorious jubilation and ecstasy.

And Margaret Raymond, listening with an anxious heart, heard those tones and smiled and was content, for now

she knew that all was right. And Mary Beaton, hearing that wonderful outburst of song, closed her eyes and involuntarily a prayer came to her lips for that grand young life that so closely touched hers.

The baby, a beautiful flaxen haired child, grew and thrived and the boy almost idolized her; and now the true disposition of John Raymond showed itself in all its contemptible nakedness. While not becoming out and out intoxicated, he still drank enough to fire the demon of hatefulness within him, his supreme desire seeming to be to devise meannesses at which any sober man would have hid his head for shame; or to lash the very soul of that proud, over-sensitive boy, until it seemed to drip blood. To watch that exquisite temper rise under the flaying of his vile tongue, and then sneeringly laugh and dare him to show any resentment whatever. What? dear reader, you say this could not be true? But I say to you, it is true, and more, for "we know whereof we speak." The pity is, that man, man created in the image and likeness of his God, capable of the highest and noblest, with everything about him in God's great universe calling upon him to be great, to be noble, to be holy, so often like a self-maddened brute stubbornly seeks to sink himself to the lowest, until it would seem that fire itself, whose duty it is to burn and purify, is far too pure and holy to even come in contact with his miserable, sin-polluted body and soul.

Horses were a passion with the boy and knowing this John Raymond would never allow him to have anything to do with the horse at home, but Jim Beaton early found out the true state of affairs and so one day in spring went over

to the home of Raymond after Alfred, as, he said, he wanted him to drive old Charlie while he cultivated corn.

Now the fact of the matter was that old Charlie needed no more to have anyone ride or drive him in the corn rows than a wheel barrow needed a fan, but Farmer Jim saw that the boy needed a horse to ride, and this was the only plausible way he could enter the wedge he meant to use later. And, oh, the joy of that boy when he was first lifted up to the sheepskin on old Charlie's back; the warm sweaty smell of the old horse's body; the feel of the thick mane, as his young hands buried themselves in it far more often than they grasped the bridle; and I'm afraid old Charlie tramped many more hills of corn from being driven than he would had he been allowed to go his own gait and training.

"But then, what's a few hills of corn?" said Farmer Jim; "guess a few hills of corn didn't amount to much when a man was learning to ride."

Then, later, there was Tom, the big bay; sometimes you had to go on errands, and then Tom went much faster; but the greatest of all was the day Farmer Jim put him up on the sorrel colt while he held the halter, and the sorrel reared right up in the air, oh, so straight, but he was not afraid, he just caught him in his big lovely mane and slapped him on the neck and said, "Be still, sir," just like Farmer Jim did, and Mrs. Beaton scolded and screamed as he fell off in Farmer Jim's arms, who laughed as he said, "That's all right son; some day you'll learn to ride, then all the sorrel colts in the world won't throw you." And Mrs. Beaton had scolded some more and said, "Jim Beaton, you'll keep on till you break that child's neck yet

with your foolishness," and Farmer Jim had said, "There, mother, there, do you wan't to make a molly-coddle out of this boy, like you have of me?" Then Mrs. Beaton laughed and said, "Guess I didn't have to work very hard, Jim," and Farmer Jim said, "See here, mother,——" but she had gone back into the house, laughing.

Ah, Jim Beaton, you old fraud you, Alfred Raymond analyzed you in after years, and he saw right through your poor, weak subterfuges and deceits; tore them all to shreds; unraveled them down to the first stitch; proved every act of yours, you old deceit you. Measured every word and weighed them; yes, weighed them in the scale of, "As ye have done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto Me." And found every one a pearl of rarest purity. And he measured you up to the Divine Rule and found you the full stature of a man, and pure gold.

Thank God, there are many Jim Beaton's in the world and there are many Mary Beaton's, and they are the "Leaven that leavens the whole lump."

All of this was years and years ago, or so it seemed to Alfred Raymond as he took his lonely way to school.

When was it? Sometime way back in the dim past, he had been a happy, laughing, singing boy. But that seemed in some dim and far-off age. He remembered reading, oh, so long ago, of the piper who had piped the little children away, away from childhood, away from happiness, away from song, and they became such old, old little children. And he wondered how that could be. What it must be like. Now he knew. He felt so old, and weary, and worn himself.

He seemed to, or thought he stood still; he felt so

desolate and cold, while all the familiar way seemed to be going by the other way, while he stood and watched it with vacant, staring eyes. Once he thought he saw some of the other school boys, and they seemed to call, but their voices sounded so dim and far away, and in a little while they were gone. Other familiar objects passed by in a slow, dim procession, and then after a while he heard the school bell, but it sounded so far off, and yet, right before him was the open door with two or three happy faces looking toward him over their shoulders. And then he seemed to see himself go in the same door. It seemed all so unreal. It seemed as if some strange boy stood in his place, and he noticed the look of surprise upon the teacher's face as that strange boy said good morning, then walked up the aisle and took his, Alfred's, seat.

He saw the wondering look the teacher bent upon that strange boy when she saw him take out his books and prepare to do his work, but in such a strange way. Once or twice the teacher spoke directly to that boy and then he saw how he hesitated to reply to his, Alfred's, name. And still he seemed to stand off and watch, 'twas so unreal. He saw how the other children looked at that strange boy, but he, the boy, did not seem to see them, he did not seem to see anything, he seemed so out of place; he looked such an old, old, boy; while he, Alfred, felt so far away, and so weary.

The long hours of the morning session dragged themselves slowly along; every time the teacher asked him a question, that strange boy would always answer. He could not understand it. 'Twas so unreal.

At last he heard the sharp ring of the bell that

called for order before the noon hour, and it seemed to drive through his weary brain like a hot, white light.

He heard the teacher's voice speaking to him and he struggled to throw off the painful lethargy that oppressed him and hear what she said. What was it? He was to remain in his seat? It never occurred to him to ask for what. In fact he felt so deathly heavy and weary that he would much rather sit still. He leaned his head on his hands. That other boy was gone, and he sat there now, all alone.

Presently someone came down the aisle and lifted his head; he looked up. It was Miss Merriam, the teacher; blank astonishment in every feature, and —— "Alfred! What is the matter? Are you ill?" burst from her lips.

He shook his head. Then it all came back to him: The run through the wet woods, the wild burst of song, the mighty prayer, and then, his father's curses. The heavy load and then the refusal to allow him to sing, and his face became for a moment positively ghastly.

Quickly Charlotte Merriam crossed the room to her desk and, picking up her lunch box, returned to the soul-stricken boy and taking up his also, she led him through a side door away from the building, through a little field, then a small grove of pine trees, to a little sheltered cove holding within its embrace the same little brook at whose side he had gone once before that day.

She made him sit down and open his lunch box, and she saw the dainty manner in which it had been arranged; the wise, maternal care that had arranged everything with loving, careful detail. Then opening hers, she began to eat, and, in as natural and easy a manner as she could, she

began to talk upon subjects that had heretofore been of interest to the boy.

Avoiding watching him, and feeling confidence in herself that she would be able to loosen that icy tension which her quick womanly intuition had shown her, she had become somewhat interested in her subject, until, happening to look toward him, she discovered that he had not once touched the tempting lunch before him.

With a quick vivacious movement of her head she said, half chiding, half laughing, "Come, come, Alfred! This will never do, you would better eat your lunch, or you won't be at all able to attend the rehearsal to-night, then what would we do at the festival? For you know, boy, the success or failure of the whole thing rests on you, and what would good Mr. Eaton say?"

"Oh! Miss Merriam! Don't! Don't!" gasped the boy.

"Don't what?" said she in amazement. "Don't what, Alfred?"

"Miss Merriam! Don't you know? Don't you know?" wailed the boy, who in his childish mind felt that all the world must know, as he knew, the dreadful truth. In his half boyish, half childish mind, the fact that his father having forbidden him to sing meant a shameful catastrophe.

Miss Merriam, reaching out and taking the slender boyish hands in her warm strong clasp, started with surprise as she felt their icy touch; yet not to be deterred, she said, giving him a little shake, and speaking half sternly, half seriously:

"Alfred, I know nothing, and am deeply pained to

find you in this condition and I do not understand. You say you are not ill, yet your hands are like ice. Now I want you to tell me. Tell me all that is troubling you. I never saw you like this before. Come, tell me! What is the matter?"

Now as she looked for the first time closely into his face and saw that wan, pinched look, the dull, leaden eyes, how the little chest had sunk, and the little form had contracted, her mind misgave her, and her fine courage faltered, for she began to fear that here might be, perhaps, a trouble that was more genuine than she had at first imagined.

She waited patiently and her heart ached as she heard that awful rasping in the delicate little throat.

"My father—he—says—I—can't—sing—at—the—festival."

"Alfred!" she half screamed, as she took him by his little frail shoulders and gently shook him in her agitation. "What do you mean? Do you know what you are saying? Think! Think! you must be mistaken! Your father could not mean such a thing! Why!— Why!—" said she, as she fairly gasped for breath. "Why, it means the ruin of the whole thing!"

"Oh! Miss Merriam! Don't! Don't!" and the boy threw up both hands as if to ward off a blow. "Don't!" he shrilled. "Oh! it hurts me so here!" and he put his hands against his throat where that awful rasping continued.

Every fibre in Charlotte Merriam's body ached as she saw that little chest heave and pant as if it would burst as those terrible sobs tore their way through that childish frame; at the sound of that awful voice as it rasped and scraped from the delicate throat.

He was going on now, and it was one awful, confused jumble. "Oh! it's awful! Awful! And what will Mr. Eaton say? Oh! what will he say? Oh, if he hadn't always been so good. And he so often like that and it's so hard, so hard, and I wouldn't mind, I wouldn't mind if he only wouldn't say anything to mother, but, but he, he swears so at mother 'nd it seems 's if I couldn't stand it, 'nd Mr. Beaton says, he says, we'll be there, 'nd they've all been so good, and mother — Oh, if it wasn't for mother! I don't care what he says to me, if —."

"Alfred! Alfred!" she screamed. "Stop! Stop! Oh, you break my heart! And all this has been going on," sobbed the woman, "and we have not known the half. Oh, God! how long! How long will we continue to hug this vile black curse to us, and hide our faces from the truth, while this cursed thing stalks through our land, its filthy garments dripping with the life blood of innocent little children and good women, leaving all its path strewn with broken and ruined lives."

Charlotte Merriam stood for a moment, overwhelmed by her emotions. Almost stunned by the revelation; then slowly she sank to her knees, and laying her folded hands upon the bowed head of the now deadly silent boy, lifted her face toward the skies above and closed her eyes. Forth from her trembling lips came this prayer: "Oh, God, be merciful."

After a few moments she rose to her feet and turned to retrace her steps to the schoolhouse. As she reached the edge of the little cove she turned to the boy, who remained seated, and said, as calmly as she could, for her mind was still in great confusion, "When I ring the bell,

Alfred, come back to the school room; I will not ask you for any lessons this afternoon." She paused for a moment, as if waiting, then added, as her voice thrilled with low intense feeling, "*God will find a way.*"

After a short time the bell rang. The scholars re-assembled, with all the confusion usual to the occasion. Alfred quietly took his place and the session went forward.

Now, this, which might appear a matter only trivial in itself, and which did not seem to need to involve so much confusion, was in reality of considerable importance.

During the last generation the little village of Bentwell had increased considerably in size and population, and had outgrown its original boundaries and spread considerably over the near lying lands until it presented with its neat attractive homes and few well-kept streets, a rather prepossessing appearance, and had become a power necessary to be considered and dealt with.

The little church, scarcely more than meeting house, which had been erected in the days of the grandfathers of the present generation, had become entirely inadequate to the demands made upon it, and so, by common consent, the old weather-stained building had been razed and a fine new edifice erected upon the old site.

The festival referred to was in reality a service arranged to consecrate the building to the use for which it had been erected.

A splendid pipe organ, the gift of a former bright young man of the church, who had gone to a distant city and amassed an immense fortune, was to be installed at the same time. And what had been at first called The Festival Dedication was now spoken of as The Festival.

The Rev. Henry Eaton had come to that little community more than thirty years before; a young man of more than ordinary ability, with a deep sense of the importance of the step he had taken, and a rare insight into the needs of the people he had come among.

He was a splendid leader of men, and had so endeared himself to these people, that at two or three different times when he had received a most flattering call to a distant largely populated town, could not be prevailed upon to sever the bond that held him to this little community.

In his early life he had been a passionate student of music, and until he received the Divine call, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations," it was supposed that that would become his chosen profession; and having studied directing under some of the most eminent and able men of his time he soon found in what a deplorable condition the so-called music of the church was.

When he had first come to Bentwell he had found conditions there no better or no worse than the average; nor did he at first attempt any sweeping changes.

With rare judgment and skill he had gradually brought the subject around; in fact, it seemed to present itself, indeed so skilfully and unassumingly had he effected the introduction that no one ever suspected that he was the originator of the entire scheme.

One day a few of the then young people had waited upon him with the idea of having some musical instruction. Oh, a kind of singing school. "Why, yes, that was a good idea. Of course they knew where they could get a teacher?"

"A teacher, why, no, they rather thought that he might,

perhaps, give them a little drilling. Oh, as much as they would need. Of course they supposed the 'singin' in meetin'' could be improved."

"Well, now, that was a good idea. He'd think it over." And ably supported by his good wife he had thought it over to the end that the following winter a first-class singing school, with real officers, real rules and a real fee, was organized. "For," as he explained to them, that "giving people something for nothing was a somewhat dangerous practice. And that when a boy or girl or, for that matter, a young man or young woman were paying their hard earned money for any commodity whatever they were the more anxious, as a rule, to get all that they were paying for, and at the same time make good use of it."

So the work was begun; the rudimentary and foundation work were laid out and taught with rare skill and judgment. Year succeeded year, and the work went steadily but quietly on until the people of that little community began to look upon this branch of the work as an established thing, sealed not only with the approval of the church, but also with the Divine approval itself.

In fact, so thoroughly established became this branch of the work that parents began to impress upon their children the importance of attending strictly to the work with a fidelity only superseded by that of the day school and the church itself.

Now the influence of the effect of this work began to make itself felt in the adjoining communities as would the influence and effect of some noble stream, which, suddenly, yet quietly, had been turned into some desert and arid land make itself felt upon that land. Yet it was, naturally, the

wonderful effect felt in the home community. Gradually the whole moral tone was uplifted and elevated. Gradually that little place took on a higher degree of education and refinement, and travelers from the great world without had been deeply impressed by the high moral tone of the place.

Very often had the good pastor expressed the desire that he "hoped that he might live to see the day that music would become a compulsory education and take its proper place with other branches of study. For," he went on to say, he "knew of nothing that was such a powerful factor in elevating the moral and religious spirit of the great world as was music."

When he first came in actual contact with the boy Alfred Raymond, he was astounded at the wonderful beauty of his voice and his remarkably acute and retentive ear; for at a very early age he displayed powers of vocalism that were most astounding. In works where older and more experienced singers had failed, particularly in chromatique, or repetition with slight variation, he sang with an ease of finality and perfection that was mechanically and absolutely correct.

The spiritual side of the boy left him much troubled, for reading the father like an open book, for John Raymond was a secret to no one, he was often led to wonder that a boy with the wonderful temperament Alfred displayed should have sprung from such a source. With Margaret Raymond he had never been able to establish any familiar footing whatever. The few calls he had made in company with Mrs. Eaton had never served to eliminate in any degree the barrier of reserve which seemed to surround her at

every point. A beautiful woman in face and form, calmly courteous at all times, polite and cordial, but beyond that he had never been able to pass. In fact the only one who had ever made any seeming impression upon this woman was Mary Beaton, and between them it was more an unexpressed bond of mutual understanding, for no word of personal character ever passed between them; although Mary Beaton was with her at the birth of both of her little girls, the younger at this time being a little over one year old.

That she was a truly religious woman he did not doubt, as she seemed not only willing but anxious that Alfred should have every advantage that the school and church offered. She paid his fee for the singing class from money she herself earned, for she was a skilful worker with her needle and so was often given employment on fine work.

How she had ever come to unite herself to such a man as John Raymond was a thing to which he could not reconcile his thoughts.

Between himself and the boy there had been no visible attachment, for very soon he had learned of the unnatural aversion John Raymond held toward him, and allowed no opportunity to pass without venting some of his devilish spleen upon him, and so he had been content to do for him what he could through such people as Jim Beaton and his wife Mary, and also through Charlotte Merriam.

Upon such points as the church work, the school and the music school, his mother had so far held her point, but now the time was fast approaching when the issue would soon have to be declared, for while the law was on her side now, only a few, oh, so few, short years must elapse when

the same law which was now his protection must turn and become his betrayer. Oh, wonderful law!

The coming festival dedication, an undertaking which, under ordinary circumstances would have proven a ridiculous farce, became in this case, by virtue of the thirty years of preparation, a festival of really great proportion, and Alfred Raymond was the keynote to the whole situation.

Through the two massive choral works from the "Messiah," "And the glory, the glory of the Lord" and the "Hallelujah," his wonderful soprano voice was the golden cord that bound the great structure together, and without him they would be simply powerless. Then as a climax the wonderful "Inflammatius" from the "Stabat Mater" was to be given in English text, the latter great solo demanding a voice of almost superhuman qualities, and all of these qualities, it was found, were all bound together in that one small childish body.

To give the affair a touch of perfection and finality, a very celebrated organist from the great metropolis, who had been a college friend of Mr. Eaton, had consented to come and play for the occasion, little Miss Paige, who was the regular organist, having refused to touch the great instrument for that celebration.

And Mr. Eaton had smiled to himself when, upon receiving the reply from the great organist consenting to play, he had read the suggestion implied, of the exceedingly proficient people it took to handle such a program, particularly the works mentioned.

And this was Tuesday, and the great festival dedication was down for Friday; and on account of that Miss

Merriam had received permission to dismiss the school for the balance of the week.

And this was the condition of the arrangements when drunken bestiality had crushed that noble boy to the earth with horror and despair, reduced Charlotte Merriam to a state of bewildered confusion and raised Margaret Raymond almost to the point of a living whirlwind.

How would it all end?

Who could bring order out of that sudden and awful confusion? For John Raymond, once set as he had set himself now, was hard to move; and the ones most interested, and the most to be injured, were the ones he hated the most; and his drunken cupidity would be able to devise no means whereby he would be enabled to create so much havoc and ruin and sate his hellish meanness as this.

Charlotte Merriam took up her regular afternoon work in a dazed, half stupified manner; and fortunately the routine work was particularly beneficial, for it gave her time to gather her scattered senses. In a dozen minutes she devised as many schemes, in the end to reject them all. That no one but herself and the boy and his mother knew of the ruin that threatened all their elaborate plans she felt reasonably certain and was thankful.

At first she thought of seeing Mr. Eaton and have him go to John Raymond, then she remembered the wretched hatred Raymond had for the pastor, so she abandoned that. That she thought of appealing to him herself, but she recalled that once, when she had asked him to allow her to take up a special course of work with Alfred, he had, with a curse, asked her to mind her own affairs. Then she thought of Jim and Mary Beaton, they seemed to

have more influence than anyone else; but suppose something should go wrong; she knew Mary Beaton's sharp but honest tongue and temper, and that might only make things harder for the boy and his mother.

Miss Merriam sighed and looked helplessly around. She could see no loophole of escape.

The hours of the long afternoon session dragged them slowly along. Interminably long to the weary, hopeless boy. Feverishly, restlessly long to the puzzled and distressed teacher.

Slowly her thoughts began to come back and shape themselves. Gradually they ceased to dart to and fro. She was able now to think more clearly. She would go and see his mother. She would not try to plan, she would let matters take their natural course. Margaret Raymond was a wise woman, and perhaps she could find the sequel to it all. Yes, she would do that.

At last the hour for closing came. The bell rang for order, there was a great bustle, a great confusion. Then gradually law and order began to prevail. A second tap, and the whole school rose. Another, and section by section the children trooped out, bidding the teacher good-night as they went. Once outside, what a release of pent-up energies! What a pandemonium! But why try to describe it? You have all heard it, for you have all been a part of it, and you all know it better than I can describe it. Only, I beg of you, don't ever try to forget it and in trying, forget that you were all once young yourselves. If you want to forget, forget that you are growing older. For if you succeed in forgetting that you yourselves were once young you have forever snapped the slender golden chain that

binds you to the opportunity of ever being of any assistance to these men and women of the future, which God meant you to be.

Alfred lingered in his seat. He seemed to be engaged in putting away his books. Then he took his way slowly to the entry. Miss Merriam said good-night as he passed her desk, to which he replied and passed out. He seemed to desire to be alone and she did not intrude.

He lingered in the entry and, a little later, he came out into the now deserted playground. All were gone. He passed down the walk, out to the road that led to his home. In spite of himself his feet seemed to linger. He wanted to see his mother, yet he dreaded to meet his father. His feet seemed to linger, and yet he seemed to be coming to the top of the little hill above his home all too quickly. With a long drawn intake of breath, which was more like a sob, he came to the brow of the hill.

He looked ahead and noticed how clearly he could see Mr. Beaton's house. Then his eyes wandered slowly up the familiar road until he could see his own home just beyond the foot of the hill; and there, yes, there by the gate was mother, waiting.

He wanted to see mother, but there was father, and his little soul sickened at the remembrance of his father.

Coming down the hill, naturally his body was impelled forward a little more quickly, and the natural resistance caused the heart to act more easily; and as the blood began to take on a more lively action, he came into a half run, and then unconsciously he swung into a slow elastic trot.

As he came nearer he could hear his mother's voice

and something in it caused him to hasten a little more. She was saying, "Come, Boy, hurry up, I want you," and he came running now, up to her, and there was such a smile on her face, and such a look in her eye, that he had to catch his breath; for she was saying, "I thought you were *very* long coming, so I came to look," and she did not give him a chance to talk but just looked right at him with that look that went right down where he had felt so sick all day and it seemed to warm him up all over, and she was saying, "For there is such a large pile of wood back of the shed that I would like to have put inside; and then wash you, and we will have an early supper, for you know they want you at the church to-night early."

"But, mother," he faltered, "father said ——"

"That's all right, Boy, but mother has something to say about that." And oh, how the soul of that boy lifted as he heard the tone in mother's voice. "Father has gone to Glenmont. They came for him to help with the building there, and he won't be home until Saturday or Sunday, and it's all right."

And then such a load as rolled off from that poor aching heart. And may God pity the wretches who go up and down the world spreading such misery and desolation. For the Divine word says, that — "Who so shall offend one of these little ones, it were better that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were drowned in the midst of the sea."

Then mother said, "Oh! Oh! See who is coming here!" And there, around the corner of the house was coming little Margaret and Baby Beatrice, and the little

baby that he loved so was standing there with her chubby hands outstretched and calling, "Bo! Bo!" And the next thing, he did not know how it was, but he had her up in his now strong arms, and she had both her baby hands in his thick wavy hair; and little Margaret held him so tight about the knees and mother was saying, "No, no, baby! No, no. Baby musn't put her hands in Bobo's hair." And somehow his eyes smarted and he said, "Oh, sho! Mother, that wont hurt me!" And pretty soon he was out behind the shed and that wood just went flying in that old shed. And sometimes he'd whistle, and then sometimes he'd sing; and oh! he felt so happy. And first thing you know the wood was all in and piled up; then he washed his face and hands and just as he came round the house, there was Miss Merriam and mother! And mother was saying, "No, Miss Merriam, John won't be able to do that work before next week, for he is away from home and won't be back in time." Then Miss Merriam said something, he couldn't quite hear, and then mother said, "Don't go, Miss Merriam, we are going to have tea and I would be so proud to have you stay and take tea with us, and then there will be plenty of time for you to go to the rehearsal, and I know Alfred would like very much to go with you."

And Miss Merriam had smiled and said she was so pleased to stay, as Alfred came up and said, "Oh! Please, Miss Merriam, do."

And then Miss Merriam said she would and oh, he was such a happy boy now; and that night at the rehearsal he sang, oh, how he sang, until Mr. Eaton had come up and said, "Easy, Boy, take it easy."

But in the wonderful "Imflammatus," they couldn't understand why the tears would start as they listened, —

"Through the loved Redeemer's dying,"

but Charlotte Merriam knew and understood.

So the dark cloud had vanished away, and God had sent the light at the evening time.

CHAPTER III

Friday morning broke bright and clear. Not a cloud in sight. The sky showed one great expanse of Heavenly blue. The sun shone with a clear, pure radiance with just a slight promise of delicious warmth. A light breeze fluttered the brilliant foliage of the gorgeously colored trees. Bathed in that beautiful coloring and rosy light, the day seemed to have been peculiarly set apart, and adorned for the use to which this people had appointed it.

Farmer Jim was coming leisurely out from the barn in response to the call for breakfast, feeling very much at ease with himself, and all the world, for here was a new holiday, right almost in the middle of the week; why, such a thing was unheard of; especially in his busy life, and Farmer Jim considered himself to be a very energetic and busy man and often spoke of the great rush that he was almost always in; and then his neighbors looked very wise and just smiled.

Why I have seen him drive out from his farmyard with his plow in the farm-truck, the heavy whiplash whirling and hissing in his big hand, half shouting all sorts of threats. But that lash never descended, and that splendid team of big bays walked along as steadily and quietly, as if Farmer Jim had been at the other end of the farm. Oh, occasionally they would flip off a too-persistent fly, but that was about all.

And I have seen that splendid team before the plow, with Farmer Jim at the handles, come to a nasty bit of

work near an old stump; heard him tell them of all the direful things that were like to happen right there, and then I have seen that fine, big off horse deliberately settle back slowly in the harness, while the nigh one went steadily, surely on and passed the obstruction, thereby leaving a better way; and yet, everything now appeared on the verge of a hopeless confusion; Farmer Jim was scolding, the plow was just moving, when the off horse, now that a way was made, stepped quietly in that way and all things swung back in their appointed place, without jostling, without confusion, and at the end of the day, one looking and seeing the work accomplished would exclaim, "How does he do it!"

How? I answer you; steady, reliable application. His horses were his friends, his children; as such he treated them, and for the love and pains he bore them, in like manner they repaid his care and protection to the full extent of their poor dumb ability.

As the mighty river moves on in its majestic course, bearing upon its broad bosom the great destinies of a great nation, so does the grand army of these stable men move silently, steadily, unflinchingly on, bearing upon their mighty shoulders, the grave and complex burdens of this, one of the mightiest nations of the earth. And God grant that that sobriety, earnestness, and honesty, may be preserved in all of its purity until they shall carry her a glorious nation and success onward, outward, upward, to the very throne of God.

Suddenly, old Shep, who had been trailing along behind, rushed around the corner of the barn barking as he went. "Here, you Shep!" called Farmer Jim after him,

"come back here!" But Shep was gone and he could hear him barking as he ran down across the meadow. "Now what's the matter with that old fool dog? Crows, I s'pose," said he as he continued on toward the house.

As he reached the little side gate that led in to the kitchen door, still hearing the barking of the dog from far down across the meadow, he turned and looked just in time to see a little flying form come vaulting over the rail fence that bounded the great field. Saw it grasp the dog by his great shaggy collar, then up across the field they came, like a small double-headed tornado; the old dog running and barking with all his might, and the boy, his glistening white feet and legs flashing in the sunlight and his slim body bent forward, running like a young Indian.

"Mother! Mother!" he called sharply, "come here, come quick!" He was almost as excited as the running pair.

A flushed anxious face appeared at the door. "What do you want now? Don't you know that breakfast's all ready and gettin' stone cold, and you stand there and keep me waitin' 'sif I didn't have a thing——"

"Hurry up, mother!" said he, breaking in upon her. "Hurry up and come here, or you'll miss it!"

"Miss what?" said she. And then drawing her apron up around her heated head and neck she came out to where he was standing, with a hurried step as she heard the barking of the dog.

"Look there, mother! Look there! Ain't that a corkin' sight? Run, boy! Run! That's the way to do it. Hooray!" Whack! And his hand came down upon his thigh with a ringing blow. "Hooray!" shouted he again

as he snatched his old wool hat off his touseled head and flung it toward the kitchen door, his honest face all alight with excitement and good cheer.

"Jim! Jim! If you ain't the beatenest!" said his wife. "I declare, you worse'n the boy!" Then shrilly to the running boy, "Alfred! Alfred! Don't run like that!"

Woof! Around the corner they came like a whirlwind; crash! Shep in turning to look at the boy made a misstep, turned a complete summersault and landed in the middle of the road with a mighty flop. The boy stopped short, while peal upon peal of laughter rang out like a flood of silvery bells, and Jim Beaton roared until his sides ached and assured the boy a little later that he knew he should be sick for a week, and 'twas all his, Alfred's, and the dog's fault. At which Alfred only sniffed and said, "Humph."

When he looked up and saw them standing at the little gate he lifted up his radiant face and —— Oo —— Oo —— hoo —— oo —— oo ——, oh, that birdlike call! How can I describe it?

"Come up, Alfred. Come up, Boy," called Mary Beaton, who, in the excitement, had forgotten all about the dreadfully ruined breakfast.

On he came with a rush, the old dog, with heavy, awkward capering, an excited second; his face glowing, his eyes flashing, his beautiful hair all wind blown and disordered, his little bared feet and legs all wet and glistening from their bath in the cold morning dew, he looked the very incarnation of boyish health and happiness.

Was this? Could this be the same boy who only a

few short days before seemed stricken as 'twere, with death itself?

Yes, it was the same boy, for youth, you know, is the time of hope, and hope is life, and youth has in it the very essence of elastic life itself.

Have you never seen some beautiful slender young tree bowed down, bent to the very earth by some unfortunate, unnatural weight, suddenly, upon being released, spring to its extreme height again and toss and wave, defiant, almost as if inviting in its wonderful flexibility and courage?

So it is with youth, for out of the shock of resistance comes strength and growth; so it was with this boy.

On he came, all glow, all life, all happiness; in his excitement and joy he forgot his manners. He forgot to be polite. But then he was only a boy. And they who loved much, were so happy to forgive much, for they truly loved.

Out tumbled the words in a torrent, one falling over the other, panting and gasping for breath; for no one can hope to run at full speed for a quarter of a mile and then expect to deliver an excited speech and do it very successfully.

"There, there, Boy," said Mrs. Beaton, as she put her arm around his panting shoulders and drew him close to her side. "Now just stop a minute and get your breath." And then there gurgled up a wave of rich laughter that was most delicious to listen to. Just as you have come upon some exquisite fresh fountain of pure sweet water that gushed up from the earth at your feet, and kneeling down you have drank and oh, how refreshed you were.

So that wave of rich laughter flowed in upon the childless life of these two disappointed ones and left a gleam of happiness that never quite disappeared.

He was talking more slowly now, quite rationally. Breakfast was quite forgotten.

Mother was going to the festival. He had begged her so hard to go. You see she so seldom went anywhere; and now there were the two little ones. But he was quite sure they would be good. Oh, he wanted her to go so much. He wanted her to hear him sing just like he sang for Mr. Eaton and all the people. And wouldn't she please go? And he would help bring the little sisters over to the church. And oh, it was so funny to hear little Margaret try to say, "Doin' t' chu'ch," and so mother said she would go, but that he must not wait for her, for they needed him to come early, and she would manage the little sisters alone.

So he had not said anything to mother, but had rushed right over, and please couldn't or wouldn't Mr. Beaton let mother and little Margaret and the baby ride in their wagon? He was sure they wouldn't take much room, and the little babies were so small, and so light —

And Father Jim and Mary Beaton were both trying to talk at the same time, and Mrs. Beaton forgot to hold fast her apron, and it dropped down from her face and a little wind kept blowing those little yellow curls all round her face, and made her look, as she said, "Perfectly silly." And she was saying, "Jim Beaton, you just get that big, roomy surry out. Good land! Are you always going to keep that thing covered up in the wagonhouse? 'fyou are, you'd better get a glass case for it. Yes, of course, child,

your mother's goin' to ride with us, and there's lots of room for both those blessed babies and you too."

And Farmer Jim was saying at the same time, "There, now, mother, didn't I tell you that we'd ought to take that big surry out only you was so all fired afraid to get a speck of dirt on't; you better put't in the parlor on the mantelry shelf with th' rest of th' ornaments."

Which things neither one had said, but the boy looked up and understood, and said, "Then I'll tell mother she may ride with you?"

"Of course she shall ride with us," said Farmer Jim, but before he could get any farther he was interrupted by a shrill scream from his wife — "Oh — h — h! Jim Beaton, here we stand gabblin' away like a couple of silly geese, and my breakfast won't be fit to eat; now you and Alfred Raymond git right in here just as fast as your legs will carry you!" And she rushed toward the house, exclaiming as she went, "You, Shep, if you don't stop forever gettin' under my feet, someday I'll give you such a kick you'll —," but the rest was lost as she disappeared storming into the house, and old Shep walked up to the door and deliberately turned his head, and cocked up one ear, as if listening to find what was to be the outcome of that awful threat. What inconceivable thing was to happen to him.

"Never mind, Shep," said Farmer Jim, as he came up and patted the old dog on the head. "You mustn't mind mother, that's only her way and she can't help it. Bark's worse'n her bite. Bark's worse'n her bite."

"Jim Beaton, you ever goin' to git in to breakfast?"

came like a shot out of a gun, as she came to the door and looked out. "Where's that boy?"

"He's had his breakfast, mother, and said that he must hurry back, his mother didn't know where he was," said Farmer Jim, as he followed his wife in to that awfully ruined breakfast.

On the night before, Thursday, being the last rehearsal for the festival, all the participants had been quite disappointed, for the great organist who was expected to have been present and go through the last rehearsal with them, was so unfortunate as to miss his train, as was announced by telegram; but assured them he would surely be on hand the next day, which was to-day.

So little Miss Paige had been obliged to take the great organ after all, although she had been, as she said herself, scarcely capable of doing full justice to the great work. However, the rehearsal had passed off very satisfactorily, but it must be confessed that the disappointment lay more in the fact that they were not enabled to hear the great man with the beautiful organ, than any extreme desire to rehearse with him.

The beautiful morning had passed away. The last touches had been applied; the final arrangements all completed.

The great organist had arrived and had been escorted to the church at his request that he might look the instrument over, and finding it in perfect condition, had, after expressing himself as perfectly satisfied, congratulated the pastor on his splendid new church and organ. All was now in readiness.

A strong feeling of suppressed excitement was abroad.

This was a great occasion. The life of the old church extended so far in the past that all those who had attended at its consecration, had long since passed away.

And now they of the present were about to dedicate the new, standing in the place of the old. The young, as it were, sitting in the lap of the old; and many an eye grew dim as they remembered the sorrows as well as the joys that had taken place in the rule of the old, as must necessarily joy and sorrow still be commingled in the reign just begun of the new.

But to-day they would be gay, so all tears would be wiped away as they turned their glowing faces toward the new, their joy and their Crown. For her they had wrought and striven. And now they would set her up, even upon her high place, and she would be their Guide and their Light, their Comfort and their Stay.

A great hush had fallen upon the people. The beautiful new church was filled to its utmost capacity. From far and near the people had gathered to participate in this solemn and beautiful service which should dedicate this sister church to the work so grandly established by the old.

The great congregation had assembled. All were filled with anxious expectancy.

The warm golden September sunlight streamed in through the rich stained glass windows, causing many to remember the vision of John.

The silence became intense. Suddenly from a small side door a man came and took his seat before the great organ. A moment of suspense, then, out over that startled throng of people rolled the opening measures of The Priests March, from Athalie. The beautiful tones of that

noble instrument filled the sacred edifice and caused it to thrill to its nethermost foundation. Presently the choir door opened again and forth came the singers, quietly and without demonstration, simultaneously with the opening of another door, from which issued the Rev. Henry Eaton and the visiting clergy, who occupied the seats upon the platform.

At the close of the voluntary, the organist, through a brilliant series of modulations, passed into the Doxology. Scarcely had he reached the second phrase when there came a sound as of wind when it first touches the highest treetops. Then a sound as of rushing waters, and glancing half 'round he saw that the choir had risen, then looking in the little mirror in front of him he could see that the great congregation was standing also.

As he finished he gave a short pause; the thought as to what this people would do with the great program again flashed through his mind; indeed, so great had been his concern that he had been much tempted to invite a few of his trained people, who were his friends, to accompany him; then, upon considering the distance and the matter of entertainment among a people who were strangers to him, he had abandoned the idea; seeking to allay his doubts with the thought, that as Mr. Eaton had prepared such an elaborate and trying service, why, the responsibility must, in the natural order of things, rest with him.

As he sounded the opening note of the great Gloria, he was almost stunned by the magnificent burst of melody that answered to the lead of the great instrument. Not one note of harmony was heard from the opening to the closing. Just one grand volume of melody which flowed

forth with an onrush that, carrying everything before it, left him almost bewildered with its wonderful intensity and fervor; and he was obliged to acknowledge that never before had he heard anything like it, for here he had found a people who sang with the spirit and with the understanding.

After a short supplication, the hymn, "Jesus Shall Reign," with Duke St., was announced; and now fully reassured as to their capability of handling this part of the service, he began to enter into the work before him with more confidence, although he realized that the great test was yet to come.

A, to him, remarkable thing, was, that simultaneously with the rising of the choir, which invariably rose at the first note of the last phrase, the great congregation stood and were fully prepared for the first syllable. No hesitancy, no lingering, no doubt. The magnificent harmony of that grand old hymn, poured forth from those hundreds of throats with a beauty and surety of tone that rivalled the great organ itself.

The program moved forward; and as the organ gave forth the opening notes of the "Glory of the Lord," the choir rose and stood calmly waiting for the last note of the prelude; then true to time and tune, with a calm assurance and splendid volume, forth pealed the alto chorus, "And the glory, the glory of the Lord;" without an instant's hesitation, without the shadow of a doubt, the choir took up their parts and the great fugue was sung with a precision of delivery and fineness of detail that left nothing to be desired.

Through the wonderful fabric the great organist

caught one golden tone, which, running like a silver cord, seemed to seize and bind the great structure in a manner that was marvellous; and at times he caught himself listening; yet it seemed to be just out of his reach, so that by the time they had reached the great "Hallelujah" he had become so thoroughly impregnated with the spirit of the throng and the place, that he passed into the magnificent prelude with a stately grandeur that seemed to sweep him forward in spite of himself.

Through all the intricacies of that splendid composition the choir pursued its triumphant way, like a conquering army. Coming to those wonderful passages, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords," that one beautiful voice that he had been trying to locate, now rose like a golden trumpet above that splendid volume. Up, up, without wavering, it soared to the climax and then sank back among the rest like a wonderful instrument to the grand finale.

Mr. John Burroughs was by this time almost in a fever of excitement; never in all his life had he had such an experience; coming to this strange people, prevented by a foolish accident, foolish on his part, for it was due to considerable carelessness that he had missed his train, and thereby missed the chance for a rehearsal with this superb choir, he had also missed the opportunity of learning the things he was now learning by a remarkable experience.

Coming among them with considerable trepidation as to what they could do, the feeling began to intrude itself upon him that perhaps these people had had some thought as to what he could do, and also wondered if he were capable of maintaining the standard they, and not he, had set up.

And then, there was that wonderful voice. That a voice of more than uncommon beauty and capability was among them he now knew, but up to the present he had been unable to locate it. That it would undoubtedly do the great solo in the "Inflammatus," he was reasonably sure.

The order of service moved steadily forward until through the building pealed the trumpet tones from the great organ which mark the opening bars of the great solo.

Alfred Raymond had taken his position among the sopranos during the fore part of the service; now as the brazen tones of the great organ rolled forth he stepped out from the main choir and stood a little in advance; from where he stood he could see the entire congregation and, for a moment, he was lost in contemplating the sea of expectant, upturned faces. Down in Mr. Beaton's pew he saw his mother and the little sisters. He saw that his mother had taken the baby Beatrice up and was holding her closely clasped against her. Then he looked at the little Margaret; she had reached out her little hand and was pointing toward him, and he saw how Mrs. Beaton took the little one up and set her upon her feet on the seat and held her. All this he saw and wondered a little at it. Then a little stir in front of him. Mr. Eaton had turned a little in his chair, and he, looking down, saw the look in the good man's face, and a little smile played across his beautiful, childish face. He heard the great organ now; those peculiar fluttering notes that always made him feel so strange, they seemed to be coming nearer, his throat ached, oh, how it ached; his little chest swelled and throbbed as that wonderful harmony seemed to surround him. Then he lifted his face, and true to time and tune,

without a tremor, out over that breathlessly expectant throng rang that glorious voice.

Clear as a bell, mellow as a flute, glorious as a golden trumpet.

“To Thy holy, to Thy holy care elected.”

within the confining spaces of the building, those wonderful tones were absolutely faultless. Down they sank through that beautiful cadence with a beauty that was almost appalling. Then up through all the gradations of that great prayer —

“Savior, let me be protected,

Savior let me be protected, on judgment, on judgment day.”

A moment's pause, then, crash! With a tremendous volume, outburst that magnificent C minor passage that seems to embody within it all the agony of the lost races themselves.

“On the dreadful judgment day,

On the dreadful judgment day,

On the dreadful judgment day,

The judgment, the judgment day!”

A death-like silence hung over that vast assemblage.

Margaret Raymond sat as if carved from stone while a mighty hand seemed to have gripped her very soul, and her face grew white and haggard.

Mary Beaton clasped the little Margaret close in her left arm and with her right she pressed the little baby hand hard against her lips and sat breathless.

The great congregation never moved.

The organ was going on with that peculiar fluttering movement, like a dove afar off, beating its wings in an agony of beseeching and sorrow. Then, out over the painful sweetness stole that voice, modulated now with an unearthly beauty.

“Through the loved Redeemer’s dying,”

back from the great choir, like a low sob came the response,

“Through the loved Redeemer’s dying,
Let me fondly still relying,”

came that Divine melody from the rarest instrument that ever came from the hands of God; a boy’s throat. On it soared, leading, leading, on, on, up, up, ever up, until it seemed as if the angels must have stooped to listen; then back it sank and rested like a jewel of rarest beauty in an exquisite diadem.

Forth it pealed again; now up, now down. Burst upon burst of prayer and entreaty, supplicating, beseeching, entreating, until the soul fainted with the great misery.

Heads were bowed, tears overflowed and ran down unnoticed. On, on, like a tempest-beaten, sin-besieged army they went, beseeching, praying, supplicating, ever struggling on, following the wonderful onrush of that glorious voice.

Up the remaining heights as if they were besieging the very gates of Heaven itself as that superb voice rang out over the full chorus in that one last grand, last appeal, “For Thy grace and mercy pray.”

Mr. Eaton, watching the boy with a fiercely intense look, was startled and, for a moment, sat as if stunned.

In one of the western windows a small cross of yellow stained glass was fixed, and the angle of the declining sun, now streaming in, had enlarged it and cast the reflection so that it hung in the space between the boy and the foremost row of the choir. Only a moment, then a little cloud floated by and the reflection passed, but the picture remained with him for many days.

The congregation rose. The benediction was spoken and the Festival Dedication was over.

CHAPTER IV

The great throng poured forth from the church doors and spread itself over the green lawn and out into the street.

No one wanted to get away quickly. Such a hand-shaking time; such a time for friendly greetings. Some had come from far away and had found it so good to be among the home folks once more. There was so much to talk over, so many questions and answers. Oh, it was so good to be here! And the beautiful new church, and the wonderful organ, and oh, that boy, that wonderful boy that sang so like an angel. Who was he? Where did he come from?

Jim and Mary Beaton were as busy as they could be answering questions and I doubt much whether they would have been any more proud of him had he been their very own. Margaret Raymond withdrew silently with her two little ones and many were the conjectures as to whom that silent, unassuming woman with the two beautiful children could be. For, as was her wont and the custom of her people, she sought to efface herself as much as she could.

Alfred having made his exit from the building, and having found some kindred spirits, was at present out under the church shed, where Farmer Jim found him sometime later, exploiting the wonderful qualities of the bays with all of a boy's freedom and familiarity.

"Here, you! What you doin' out here? The Dominie's been looking all over for you. That organ man

wanted to see you. Never mind now," said he, as Alfred started off, "they're gone now. He's goin' to stay till next week, so he'll see you 'fore he gets away. Can you untie Dandy while I fold up this blanket?"

Oh, that ride home! He sat on the front seat between Farmer Jim and Henry, and sometimes Farmer Jim let him drive and Dandy and Bess trotted along just the same as if Farmer Jim had been driving them, and when they got to his home he was out and over the wheel before Mrs. Beaton had a chance to scream at him that he'd, "sure break his neck or leg or something!" You see she was awful good, but you see she'd never been a boy, so how could she know. Then he lifted little Margaret out and then he took the baby Beatrice down, but Henry had to hand mother out, for the baby kicked and screamed when he went to put her down, and they all laughed so and everybody was so happy. And that night he talked to mother all about it. And wasn't it nice! And oh, there were so many people there, and the lovely organ, why you just had to sing, you couldn't help it. And he told mother how Mr. Eaton had looked up at him, and how it had made him smile — and oh, he most wished there was a festival every day; but, but then one must go to school, for one must learn all one could, for when one was a man — and so he rattled on, for he was only a boy; and then one baby would interrupt and then the other — and oh! he was so happy.

The short evening drew to a close. Baby Beatrice had been prepared for bed. Mother had been real patient and finally she was fast asleep; then he wanted to show little Margaret all about how he rode the sorrel colt, and

wouldn't mother put her upon his back, and hold her fast by the arm just like Farmer Jim did with him? Then he would rear up just like the sorrel colt had, and then mother must catch little Margaret, just like Farmer Jim had caught him. And mother said, "Oh, how foolish!" and smiled, and then he laughed, that rich gurgly laugh, that seemed to come from somewhere way down in you; and then mother smiled so at you with her eyes.

And so he got down on the floor and mother put little Margaret on his back, and then he reared right up, just like the sorrel colt did, and she laughed, oh, how she laughed when she fell in mother's arms, and ——— *Crash!* Margaret Raymond, with a wild cry of alarm, caught the child to her, then stood as if frozen to the spot at the sight that met her eyes.

Alfred sprung to his feet and faced the open door, a look of agonized horror upon his childish face.

There, just outside the door, in the night, with the darkness behind him, and the light full on his face, stood John Raymond; his steel blue eyes blazing with drunken fury.

For a moment Margaret Raymond's brain reeled. The boy stood between her and the rum-infuriated man. The little one in her arms trembled and clutched closer to her.

What should she do? What should she do? Should she attempt to place herself between them and so divert his attention to her?

The little one in her arms was beginning to sob and cry. The boy did not move.

"Nish way ye have o' treatin' th' old man," he was going on, a malignant leer upon his bleared face.

The boy turned sick and faint but could not take his eyes from that loathsome sight. As the full meaning of the situation came over him his childish brain reeled; he tried to think of some way of escape. There was none. He never remembered anything like this before. Mother was back of him somewhere, but he did not dare to look. He did not dare to take his horror-stricken eyes away from those fiendish blue ones.

"Nish way y' have o' treatin' th' old man." Oh, the devilishness in that voice, "thought y'd fool the old man; yes, waited 'til th' old man's back was turned. Nish way t' treat th' old man."

Margaret Raymond hushed the child upon her breast and waited, watching.

He lurched heavily into the door. "Nish little boy, down t' church singin' 'salms an' tunes wile ole man workin' hard. Nish folks down t' church, have nish li'l' boy singin' tunes wile ol' man out workin', nish li'l' boy."

Margaret Raymond moaned.

"Oh, you shut your —— —— mouth, old woman, I'll attend to you later. Nish li'l' boy, I'll fix your singing for you!" Quick as a flash he sprung forward and caught the terrified boy by his slender throat with both his huge hands, drew the ghastly little face up to his red bloated one, and then flung him from him with all his drunken fury. "You damned bastard!"

So quick had been the move that his wife stood as if petrified; then as he started forward toward the prostrate form of the child she woke with a sudden mad fury. "John Raymond, stop!" Her voice rung like a trumpet, but the drink infuriated man continued to advance.

Quick as lightning she sprung forward to the table, caught the lighted lamp in her free hand and flung it with all the strength of her splendid body full in his face and chest.

Whether the wild whirl of the lamp or the man's breath, when it struck him, extinguished the flame, God only knows, but it was only the intervention of the hand of God himself that saved the life of the wretch that night.

The force of the blow was so great that as the broken glass fell from him to the floor he staggered back swiftly to the open door. To save himself from falling he threw out both his hands. His left caught the doorpost while his right slid along the open door and finding no hold he whirled 'round out. The violence with which he swung out from the door loosed his left hand which precipitated him across the walk into the low, forked branches of a cherry tree.

Catching, or being caught by them, he held on for a few moments, then, pulling himself upright, reeled off toward the road cursing as he went.

Half dazed from the blow of the burning lamp against his chest and face, he staggered slowly on his drunken way back to the village.

He had completed the work which had taken him away from home in much less time than had been expected, but instead of going directly to his home had taken a somewhat roundabout way, and, stopping at different points along the way, had become quite intoxicated by the time he reached Bentwell, where he stopped to have a few drinks with some friendly(?) spirits.

When he entered the bar-room of the village tavern

only a few of the regular loungers were on hand, and the sight of him entering the door was the signal for a general greeting; as the events of the day, the dedicatory service at the church was still fresh in their minds; so they, while none of them had been present, yet having heard the details from others, now wished to be the first to congratulate him on the success of the boy, Alfred, thereby hoping to win his favor and get a few more drinks out of him.

As he listened rather stupidly to their clamor, slowly the meaning of their words began to penetrate his rum deadened brain.

“What in —— ’r you talking ’bout?” said he roughly.

They all hastened to give as glowing an account of the affair as they in their muddled condition could.

“What!” he almost yelled. “And did that —— little —— —— dare to go and sing at that —— —— p’formance after I told him not to? Why, the —— —— I’ll fix his singin’ for him! I’ll break every —— —— bone in his —— —— body!” And with a volley of filthy oaths he rushed out of the room.

This was the way he heard the news and come to be in such a drunken rage when he reached his home; and with what results we have already seen.

Now he made his way back to the tavern, went up to the bar and ordered a stiff drink of whiskey, then he went off and sat by himself in a corner.

One of his cronies went over to him and tried to draw him out, but after being roughly repulsed, with an oath, went away and left him to himself.

He drank considerably, and when at last the landlord

began closing up for the night he rose and slunk out into the night alone.

While he sat there brooding over the events of the past few days his hatred toward the boy increased, and realizing that his wife had set his authority at naught, he now resolved to crush both at once, so his drunken brain began planning how he could wreak his vengeance on both, and still keep himself clear of the law, for well he knew there were those in the community who would be only too glad to get at him.

That his wife would never speak he well knew; also the boy could be very reticent; so as he came near to the house he began to go very cautiously; he opened the gate very carefully and made his way around the house, walking on the grass.

What hellish scheme was in his mind?

Softly he went up to the door. It was closed. There was no light anywhere.

Carefully he lifted the latch and tiptoed in.

He stopped and listened.

No sound.

He took another step. His foot struck against a piece of glass.

At that sound all the hellish fury in him broke loose, and screaming like a madman he rushed across the room to the sleeping room and flung himself bodily across the bed, beating with his arms and fists with a wild fury. For a minute he continued, uttering wild fiendish yells; then, as he met with no resistance, he realized that the bed was empty.

Springing to his feet, with a frightful oath, he started

for the door, and crashed into the chest that stood across the room.

Over on the floor he went, knocking over a small table in his fall.

For a moment he lay still; then becoming aware of a light in the room he looked up to see Farmer Jim Beaton, with his man Henry, standing at the door, lantern in hand, while just back of them were the faces of two or three other neighbors.

"John, what does this mean?" said Jim Beaton, as he flashed his light over the disordered room; then seeing the tumbled bed he hurried over to it his face ghastly with horror.

For a moment his eyes refused to see, then as his vision cleared he gave a great gasp of relief when he discovered that the bed was empty.

John in the meantime had risen and stood sullenly by, the other men and Henry filling the door.

"John Raymond," said Farmer Jim again sternly, "what does this mean?" Where are your wife and children?"

Raymond kept sullenly silent.

"Boys," said Farmer Jim, "you stay here and take care of him while Henry and I search the house."

Raymond started to protest.

One of the men stepped up to him and looking him full in the face said, "John Raymond, set down and keep still or it will be the worse for you."

Raymond glared at him for a moment, his face twitching with fury, but seeing the determined faces looking into his, flung himself upon the chest.

Meanwhile Farmer Jim and Henry started on their search.

As the little staircase which led up to Alfred's room was the only means of communicating with the upper part of the house they stopped at the foot and called softly.

Receiving no reply, Farmer Jim spoke again. Still no answer.

Hurrying up the stairs they made their way through the two upper rooms.

All was quiet, all in order. Alfred's little bed was untouched. All of his little things were in their usual place. Only they noticed the little recess where his clothes were wont to hang was uncovered.

On the floor at the foot of his bed were his little worn school shoes with the stockings lying, as if flung down, near by, for Alfred in his haste to dress that day had hastily cast them aside.

A sudden fear went through the great, strong, loving heart of Farmer Jim at the sight of that empty bed and those little boyish things which he had come to know and love so well.

"Henry!" said he, "they're gone!"

They hurried down stairs and made a quick search through the lower part of the house; no trace of them anywhere.

"Boys," said Farmer Jim, as he came back to where the rest of the party were, "they're gone!"

"Gone!" they repeated, staring blankly at him. "What do you mean? Gone where?"

"I don't know," said he. "The boy's bed has not

been touched; this bed was not disturbed until this brute evidently threw himself upon it."

John Raymond looked stupidly about him. He was trying to understand. There was something working against him here that he had not counted on, something that made him begin to feel afraid.

"The barn! The horse!" he exclaimed.

Henry hurried out, and after a little returned shaking his head. "There is nothing there, at least nothing has been disturbed," said he.

But where could they have gone? Henry, coming from the village, had chanced to hear from some of John Raymond's cronies the threats he had made earlier in the evening, and hurrying home and telling Farmer Jim had been dispatched with the report to some of the other neighbors requesting them to join in forming this party, as they all had become wearied of Raymond's cruelty to his family, and particularly to the boy.

There had been a hearty response and it was with fear and consternation that they had heard the uproar when they had first arrived, thinking that he had already inflicted irreparable injury to those helpless ones. And yet, while all felt shocked at the disappearance, it was with a feeling of relief that, temporarily at least, they were out of the reach of this brutal husband and father.

"Wait a minute!" said Henry, and he hurried out of the door and out to the road. Holding his light low down he soon discovered in the dust of the road the footprints of the woman and boy going down the road.

He rushed back into the house. In his haste he stepped upon the broken lamp. He stopped and looked

down. "Hey! Come here!" said he. They all gathered round while he examined the broken lamp.

"John Raymond," said Jim Beaton, "what does this mean?"

John Raymond hung his head, and then they noticed that his clothing was saturated with oil.

"Boys," said Henry, "they've gone down the road toward our house. I found their tracks in the dust!"

Out of the house all hurried leaving Raymond behind in the dark.

"Careful there, boys," said Henry, "let me take the lead. I'll show you where they are." And leading the way he soon found the footprints again. Then they moved along, holding their lights low down, and so followed the way taken by Margaret Raymond and Alfred earlier in the evening.

John Raymond followed along behind; he dared not remain in that house alone; it was filled with awful shapes and he was afraid.

Those lights ahead. They drew him. Oh, how he feared that vague shadowy little company, yet he could not tear himself from it, so he followed on behind. What would they find? He was beginning to shiver.

Mary Beaton, standing at her window watching, saw that little company of lights coming toward her down the road; she had been in a very fever of anxiety. Would they never come? What had they found?

She went out and down to the road.

How slowly they come! What made them come in that manner? Why did they form two lines and walk so far apart with their lanterns so low down?

"Oh, why don't they hurry? Why don't they hurry?" murmured the woman.

She could wait no longer. She started up the road to meet them. "Jim! Jim!" she called.

"Yes, mother," said Farmer Jim.

"Jim! why don't you hurry? What is the matter?" And she started forward again.

"Wait, mother," said he. "Wait, don't come any further." Then, as he came up, said, "They're gone."

"Gone!" echoed she. "Gone! Where?"

"I don't know," said he, "they were gone when we got there; Henry found their tracks in the dust; see here? There they go. Margaret and the boy. Don't come too close, we're trying to follow them."

"Oh!" she shrilled, "and where is that brute?" she continued, as she looked out in the dark.

Now the men with the lights stood between her and John Raymond, and she did not see him, and so she did not see the look of black shame upon his face as he shrunk into the deeper shadows.

But the party were moving carefully forward again on up the hill; slowly they went; then they found where the boy had stopped; the tracks led to the side of the road. Then on again. On through the night and the dark they went; step by step they followed that pitiful line of foot-steps on, on, until finally they came to the railroad.

They crossed over to the other side; carefully they held their lights low down expecting to find the broken thread of the trail.

Only the dusty road.

They stopped. Then they went a little farther, being

careful not to disturb the dust of the road. No sign. They went a little farther. Still nothing.

Then they went back. There were the tracks; but look! They had not noticed at first the tracks turned toward the side of the road toward the south-bound track.

Their faces were gray with horror as they looked toward each other in the dim lantern light. What was just out of sight there in the darkness and the night? They dared not think.

John Raymond, still following along in the rear, heard their low-voiced parley and he shivered as with an ague.

"Boys," said Jim Beaton, and his voice shook as he spoke, "they're out there somewhere."

A groan was the only response.

Their faces blanched; for on the still night air suddenly burst a long, terrible scream. Instinctively they stepped closer together.

'Twas only the whistle of the great express blowing for the crossing, but coming upon them at the present moment it had startled them mightily.

On she came with a mighty roar. Her great headlight shone far ahead and illuminated the track for nearly a half mile. Eagerly they looked. There was nothing in sight.

Now she was fairly upon them. They stepped back as she rushed by with a mighty roar.

God pity anything that should be in her path to-night.

On down the track she sped. A moment and she was only a twinkling of lights in the distance.

Down the track they searched. No sign anywhere.

They were gone, leaving not a single trace whereby they might be followed.

In the gray dawn of early morning the little searching party returned to their homes. Gray of face, gray of heart; all hopes gone.

With the full light of day new search was made. Fresh inquiries. Nothing.

A few days later a gang of laborers left a little worn bonnet at the station. It had been found along the track *above the road*.

Jim Beaton carried it home to his wife.

It was the little bonnet that Margaret had worn the day of the festival; Mary Beaton remembered it, for it was so out of style. John Raymond, or rather the John Raymonds, must needs clothe the families of the rum sellers, but the Margaret Raymonds — well, they must go without, or — oh, why talk of it. You all understand.

About a week later a small package was left at the little station. It had been found far up the line, well up toward Bart-Haven, and hearing of this mysterious disappearance it was sent down to the station near Bentwell. Jim Beaton brought it home to his wife.

For a time she held in but made no move to open it.

Finally he said, "Aren't you going to open it, mother?"

She looked up into his face, her face drawn with pain, and ghastly white.

"Jim, Jim," she said in a hoarse whisper, "I — I'm afraid."

He reached down and took up the little bundle, slipped the string from off one end, then opened it.

When Mary Beaton heard the rattling of the opening paper she covered her face with her hands.

The rattling stopped. The paper fell to the floor. She felt something laid across her lap, something that felt soft and clingy.

She heard Jim catch his breath with a fierce hiss; then she felt his hand upon her shoulder. A moment later she heard the door close. She was alone.

She dropped her hands down to her lap. They touched something soft. Something that thrilled her through with an awful agony. She lifted it to her arms. She pressed it to her face. What was it? Only a little worn suit of boy's clothes. That was all. They were not much, but they were the best he had. And as Mary Beaton held them close pressed to her bosom, again she felt the little warm pulsing body of the beautiful star-eyed child she had held in her arms for the first time twelve years before.

Down by the barn Jim Beaton stood looking out over the great meadow toward the old rail fence. There was a little path coming up from the old rail fence, and as in a vision he saw the flash of a pair of little bared white feet and legs all wet and glistening with the cold morning dew. The glow of a beautiful boyish face. The flash of a pair of grand gray eyes. Old Shep came up beside the man and looked out along the path and whined. The man neither moved or spoke. It was evening time and there was no light.

The next morning Jim Beaton drove over to the village and on his return he stopped at the home of John Ray-

mond. He found him in the barn busied at putting things in order.

“Good morning, John,” said he, to which the other replied with a surly nod, while a dark flush burned below his eyes.

“Mary wants to see you over to the house,” he went on, “she has got something of —” He stopped for a moment while John Raymond looked eagerly up. “Something of the boy’s and she would like to know what she shall do with it. I have the rig at the gate; will you go now?”

The other nodded.

Silently they passed out of the building, John Raymond stopping to close and fasten the door. As they passed the house he shivered and Jim Beaton saw that he avoided looking in that direction.

In silence they took their seats in the waiting vehicle and no word passed between them during the drive.

Upon reaching the end of the drive, Farmer Jim said briefly, “You will find her up at the house.”

John Raymond walked slowly up the path to the house. Every impulse of his wretchedly selfish nature urged him to resistance; to refuse to go any farther; to turn back; yet at every step the words “She has something of the boy’s” beckoned him with an irresistible force. He wanted to turn back, yet he dared not. He wanted to rush away. And why did he not?

In the glaring light of day the whole wretched scene came before him and he was afraid.

He looked up and saw Mary Beaton standing just

before him in the open door. She spoke to him, and her voice sounded low and sad.

Her face was pale and her eyes were the eyes of one who, looking into an open grave, are trying to catch one more glimpse of that which has passed out and beyond, and seeing that look he followed her silently into the house.

Along the silent old hall she led him to the large roomy old sitting room.

Across the room from the chair where she motioned him to sit was a large old-fashioned recess that contained within its roomy depths a bed. It was covered with a snowy counterpane and upon it something was placed that was covered with a newspaper.

At the first look he had given a sudden start, as an awful thought flashed through his mind, then he quickly recovered himself when he saw that whatever it was it made no impression upon the bed.

He turned and looked at Mrs. Beaton, who had taken a seat at his left near the foot of the bed.

She turned and looked toward the covered object upon the bed, and for a little time seemed to have forgotten him entirely.

The steady tick of the old hall clock came in through the open door and it made him nervous; he had always been a selfish, surly fellow, and now finding himself so completely checkmated, it gave him an entirely new, and at the same time very disagreeable feeling.

At last she turned to him and spoke. Her voice was low, but there was something in it that troubled him.

Before there had been something of the shrew in the voice and manner of Mary Beaton, but all of that was

gone now, and in the place of it there was something that made him afraid.

He thought he knew Mary Beaton, but this woman was a stranger to him. A woman that seemed to know him better than he knew himself. A woman that was analyzing; taking him all apart, as it were, and he was seeing how rotten and filthy those parts were. She was speaking, "John Raymond, I suppose you have wondered what I have to say to you and why I have sent for you."

His head bent low, but he made no reply, for that deep, low voice was going on. "You know they had found the bonnet Margaret wore up along the track?"

He nodded.

"And yet you never came near to claim it. I kept it for I wanted to see if you would come for it, but you did not. Last night they brought this —" and with a quick movement she drew the paper away and as John Raymond looked up quickly his frightened vision beheld the blurred outlines of what at first looked like a little form.

He sprung to his feet and took a few steps forward, then he stopped.

Mary Beaton, too, had risen and was watching him.

Then he saw the little worn suit of clothes which had been Alfred's, and how at the top was placed the bonnet which his wife had worn, arranged in that manner had given him a mighty shock.

He went back to his chair and sat down.

"John," said she, "I want to know what took place the night you came home from Glenmont."

He threw back his head and made as if to protest, but she was going on and that something in her voice

swept all the resistance away from him. She never once removed her eyes from him and fascinated he could not turn his gaze away. "We know," continued she, "how you had forbidden Alfred to sing at the dedicatory service simply to satisfy your own devilish spleen. Charlotte Merriam found the whole thing out that day at school.

"Do not think that she made any endeavor to pry into the affairs of your family, for she did not; but it has been no secret for a long time the brutal, beastly manner you have treated that boy and his mother.

"Henry heard of the threats you made that night from some of the men who were in your company, and it is known that you went to your home fully intending to wreak your hellish spite upon the boy and his mother for seemingly having disobeyed your orders.

"That you committed some outrageous act is also known, for the broken lamp was found on the floor, and your clothing were saturated with oil. A washbasin of water was found upon the table, and you, in your drunken stupor, was heard to say, 'Threw the lamp at me! Threw the lamp at me! I'll fix her!' Now I want to know just what took place. I want to know ——" and her voice rung out with a terrible menace as she bent fiercely toward him. "I want to know why she threw the lamp at you."

"I ——," the words seemed dragged from him as if by some unseen force. "I —— told —— him —— I'd —— fix —— him ——, and I —— grabbed —— I —— grabbed ——."

The woman waited, her head bent forward, her hands

tightly clasped across her panting chest. She never took her eyes from the man's face.

"I grabbed him — by — the — throat —, and — I — choked — him —."

"Ah — h — h —," a wild scream rent the air. Like a catapult Mary Beaton hurled herself forward. John Raymond, seated, was entirely unprepared and so perfectly helpless.

Like an infuriated animal she flung her magnificent body upon him, catching his throat in her fine strong hands. Pressing her thumbs hard and holding the neck in her fingers with her knee pressed upon his chest.

"You brute! You beast!" she screamed. It seemed to her that she went mad. She held him as in a vice. She saw his lips open. His horror-stricken eyes looking into hers. His tongue began to protrude. At sight of that she drew him slowly toward her, and then flung him from her with all the force of her maddened body.

She staggered back and leaned, panting, against the wall at the foot of the recess.

When she made her fierce attack upon him, John Raymond saw again the little room in his home. In the foreground stood the slender, horror-stricken boy. Back of him, by the table, stood his white-faced wife holding the trembling child clasped close in her arms. He saw himself spring forward and catch the terrified child by the throat, and then he felt a sickening, deadly, choking sensation; it seemed that he died a hundred deaths; he saw himself fling the boy from him. He felt himself falling, falling into unknown depths; and then he felt himself strike the floor.

For a few minutes he lay too dazed and bewildered to move.

At length he stirred. Then he looked up, Mary Beaton was watching him, a deadly light still blazing in her eyes.

"Get up," said she.

He rose slowly to his feet, every power of resistance gone out of him.

"Sit down." Her voice cut the air now like the blade of a knife.

"You choked that boy?"

He nodded.

"Go on," came through her clenched teeth. He shuddered.

"Then I flung him back, he went past his mother." Mary Beaton's head twitched and at sight of it he cowered down. "I started forward, she called me to stop; I went on, and then she picked up the lighted lamp and threw it full in my face." Mary Beaton was terribly excited, yet controlled herself. "It drove me backward out of the house, and I went back to the village, and when I came back they were gone. The rest you know."

"Yes; the rest I know," said she, "but there are some other things I want to know; Jim Beaton and I have been busy; we have made inquiries all up along the line, but no trace of them has been found. That they must have gotten away upon some train, is reasonably sure; yet no one has seen or heard anything from them. Jim learned that a big freight, in charge of Jerry Bond, met with a breakdown, and held up the Bentwell crossing that night for about an hour, but the entire crew maintained that they saw nothing of them at all, and God only knows where they are.

“Jim and I have been over to Westport, your and Margaret’s old home, but no one has heard anything of them there; we went to see Mr. Arnold, the neighbor who has charge of the property left to Margaret by her father and mother, and he was much distressed to learn of the affair.

“While there I learned many things about you and Margaret and I cannot understand how a girl, reared as Margaret Rathmore was, ever consented to place her life in the hands of such a man as you. For in spite of the fact that your parents were Quakers, and very excellent people, you have anything but a good reputation in that place. Also, it is no secret that she refused always to listen to your wooing, or in fact to have anything to do with you, and then to suddenly, after the death of her parents, marry you and leave, was a great surprise to all who knew her.

“How any woman could consent to link her life with such a beast as you were and have been, I cannot understand. That you must have used some underhand means seems very likely.”

At the implied imputation the man flushed, and at the taunt he made one last effort to regain the mastery of himself.

“Oh, well, you needn’t think she was such a saint,” said he. “The boy, Alfred Raymond, as you call him, is not my son, he is ——.”

Like a flash Mary Beaton was on her feet. “John Raymond! Stop where you are! Don’t you dare to breathe one word against the name of that woman!” cried she.

Something in her face froze the vile taunt upon his lips; well for him that he did not repeat the filthy epithet he had hurled at Alfred Raymond, to her.

"I went to her home," continued he, after a few moments, "where I found her with the boy, but from whence he came or who he was she refused absolutely to tell. I so wrought upon her fears, as I pointed out the peculiar situation into which she had placed herself, that I finally persuaded her to marry me, promising that we would remove to some distant part of the country where no one would know or suspect anything about the boy. When I found that she was so bound up in the child, I came to hate him, until it seemed that the greater my dislike grew, the more she loved him; when my two little girls were born, I thought she would now turn from the boy and love my children; but she did not. And I hated him all the more. Had he disliked my children I would have been pleased, but he did not; the more he loved them the more I hated him ——."

"There, John Raymond, that will do," said Mary Beaton, who had listened attentively, but as he began to talk of his hatred, she interrupted him, "that is enough of such talk as that; for you may as well know that such can only lower your contemptible character lower than ever if such a thing were possible.

"And you can sit here and boast of such a thing to me after having shown yourself the miserable cur that you are, and then try to build up any semblance of manhood upon your miserable treatment of Margaret Raymond and that boy. Oh, God! if I must say such a thing! if you could only realize what a contemptible cur you are! Oh, that

you could see yourself as you are, in all your hideous nakedness, how you would despise yourself."

Her words cut like a whip, and his head went down before her in shame as she continued, "And such women as Margaret Rathmore get such brutes and beasts for husbands as you, and bear with your brutalities and infidelities and make no complaint. You make me think of a story that I read the other day, a story of that splendid thing they call 'man.'" He winced. "Yes," she continued bitterly, "man."

"It was winter. Cold, ice, and snow. A little band of Indian women with their helpless children were endeavoring to make their way to a place of safety. All day they had tried to evade the deadly bullets of the soldiers, for their lives and for the lives of their little ones. All to no avail. They were being slowly hemmed in. Then up rose one from among them and taking the blanket from off her head and shoulders, said, as she wrapped it around the shivering form of her little one, 'woman of my people, there is no way of escape, no hope. Let us stand up and show these men that if we are to die, we are not afraid to go out upon the silent trail alone.' And suiting the action to the word, she turned her splendid bared bosom and arms, in the bitter icy cold, to the pitiless balls of the enemy.

"And so again is it being done in this, our splendid day and age.

"The noble women and helpless little children, out in the bitter storms of adversity are being besieged upon all sides by the deadly missiles of that great curse, rum. By the pitiless weapons of unbridled lust. temper, and brutal-

ity, until driven to the last ditch, the grand motherhood and sisterhood of our race are standing with bared, naked breasts to the deadly onslaught, saying by every act, in every protest, 'women of our people, since we must die, let us stand and show this savage horde that we dare go out upon the last, silent trail, honorable, pure, and true women, alone and unafraid.'

"But," and her voice rang out deep, clear, and resonant, infinitely sad. "But the bitt'rest part is, that among that vast army of oppressors are those who should be our protectors. Our fathers, our husbands, our brothers and our sons. For every John Raymond there is a Margaret Raymond, an Alfred Raymond, a Margaret Raymond, and a Beatrice Raymond, all sacrificed to the selfish appetite of one man."

Mary Beaton stood, and the burning words rolled from her lips like molten flame. To John Raymond she seemed like some prophetess of old, and he shuddered as the hideous picture her words called up unfolded before his eyes.

His head remained sunken upon his chest. All the life and vitality seemed to have gone out of him. All his wretched life came up before him and cast him, as it were, a naked, festering soul upon some unknown desolate shore. Oh, how he wished for some thing under which he could creep for shelter.

His whole miserable past stood out in the broad glare of the truth as it came from the lips of this woman, and seemed to overwhelm him.

He was silent. Dumb. Condemned.

Again she spoke. She was talking to him. "What are you going to do now?" she asked him.

He shook his head. He had no speech.

"Have you no plans at all?"

Again he shook his head.

"You cannot go on living where you are," said she.

Again he made a negative movement.

"Listen," she continued, "Jim and I have been talking the affair over; you cannot stay where you are; Jim needs another man; will you come here with us?"

John Raymond looked up. Surprise, incredulity, astonishment upon his face.

She saw the look and went on. "Yes, I mean what I say. I know that you are surprised, but not more than I am at myself; I am a changed woman. Listen, John Raymond, and mark well what I say: I am a barren, desolate woman. God has decreed that no little lives shall enter in to bless mine; and Jim Beaton and I have broken the bitter ashen crust together, and uncomplainingly. When I first saw Margaret Raymond and her boy, a new spirit and hope was born in my soul. In my heart that boy became as my own, and I know that Jim had at last found that also which satisfied in part his great longing; and we were happy in the love we bore that boy, and the love we felt he had for us. Although the bitter unkindnesses indulged in by you toward him has caused us many a tear.

"When your little daughters were born I then fully realized what must have been the feeling of the barren woman of Israel when she was willing to bear the mother upon her knees, for the child that might thus be born in her life. And in like manner I bore them in my heart as

my own. But you have bereft us of children and them of a home. We have tasted of the waters of the fountain of childhood, albeit it was that of another, and we are changed. Whereas we would have cast you out, now, for the sake of them, we open our house and home to you and will endeavor to do you good. But remember, not one drop of that accursed stuff must pass your lips so long as you abide with us.

“ Since that little suit of clothes was placed in my hands last night, I have been standing beside a little open grave, wherein lie entombed a childhood slain, and a youth foully murdered; and we are left desolate and sad.”

In the presence of the man, clothed as it were with a stately, mournful dignity, she went to the bed and taking up the things lying there she carried them across the room to a large old-fashioned bureau, and opening a deep drawer she very carefully and tenderly laid them within.

The man watched with a strongly fascinated gaze as she stood looking down as into an open coffin; then slowly she covered them, pushed the drawer to and locking it, turned away.

A few days later John Raymond, with the help of Jim Beaton and his wife, removed his things from the deserted house and carried them to the big old Beaton house, where they were carefully put away in a large upper room.

Mary Beaton and Jim passed hand in hand through their dark Gethsemane as she took the little worn garments of Alfred and his two little sisters and put them away for the last time. And Jim Beaton nearly broke down when he found a little pair of worn, copper-toed boots and, carried them down to his bedroom, where he placed them

in the rack by his; the last thing he sees at night, and the first thing in the morning; and daily there goes up a prayer from that great silent heart, that God will lead those little feet aright and bring the lost ones home at last.

CHAPTER V

Inside the door, after John Raymond had staggered away, was heard the low sobbing of the little child.

Margaret Raymond stood for a moment listening to the retreating footsteps of the drunken man; then she hurriedly found a match and lighted a tallow candle. Stilling the frightened child in her arms she hurried over to the prostrate boy. Running her hand over him she soon ascertained that no bones were broken; fortunately, during the play in the earlier part of the evening, a pillow had been thrown to the floor, and this it was that had helped to break his fall.

He lay stunned and dazed. She brought a basin of cold water and bathed his head and face which slowly caused him to revive; after a little she tried to have him swallow some, but the effort seemed to give him considerable pain.

After a little she raised him to his feet and placed him in a chair.

"Mother, mother!" Oh, that horrible rasping sound again, only intensified a hundred fold. "Mother," wailed he, "he will kill us! Oh, what will we do! What will we do!"

"Listen, Boy, can you stand on your feet?" The boy stood up. "Where do you feel bad?"

"Oh, I feel so sick and dizzy," moaned he.

"Do you think you could go up to your room?" said she.

"But if he should come back," said the boy, but she interrupted him.

"Listen," said she, "can you go up to your room and get your good clothes, and put them in a small bundle?"

"But mother, you ——."

"Don't stop to talk, but do as mother says," said she.

She went with him up the stair, carrying the candle in one hand and the little child in her arm; took down the things, and showed him how to make them into a small bundle; then, after lighting his little bed-room lamp, she returned to the living room.

First she soothed the little one in her arms, then she quickly gathered together a few needful things, and made them up into a small, neat package.

Then she went to an old chest that had been her mother's, which was stored with many treasured keepsakes, and finding a package of money, she securely fastened it in the waist of her dress. Money that she had earned with her needle that her husband knew nothing of.

Next she took up the little sleeping child, and without disturbing her, dressed her warmly and carefully; then she dressed the little Margaret more warmly. In the meantime the boy had come down from his room, bringing his little lamp with him.

He looked at his mother with questioning, wondering eyes. He had not heard the last vile epithet John Raymond had hurled at him, but his mother had; and that broke the last frail thread that bound her to him.

He had sworn to love, honor, and cherish. He had outraged and broken all three. Henceforth, her life and the lives and safety of her children must be her first thought.

What? You condemn her hasty act, gentle reader?

But are you in condition to condemn?

I would ask you to have a care how you pass judgment; for it may be that you are equally guilty with the John Raymonds of the world.

You know that we are moving so rapidly in our advancement; we are so humane; so very humane that we had to abolish the whipping post; it was so inhuman, you know. But of course there's nothing inhuman when a great, strong, rum-crazed beast of a man raises his hand against his wife, the mother of his children, the woman whom he has sworn, before God's holy altar, to love, honor, and cherish. Think of it! Sworn to love, honor, and cherish; and she bears the burden of a broken body the rest of her days. When he will break the bodies of his weak, frail little children, so that we look upon their little crippled forms at every step of the way. What do you call this, oh, ye very tender-hearted ones?

You say that we are living in an advanced age. Yes, it is a glorious advancement, when it is made over the ruined bodies of noble women; over the broken bodies of innocent children.

Somewhere I have read that the indirect is as great and real as the direct. If that is so, how do you, oh, you who lust so for gain, that you raise great, beautiful crops of tobacco, because the fertility of your soil permits it; of course you sell the filthy stuff off from your premises, because you would not have it around and the money of course, it is clean; tell me, how do you reconcile that with your conscience, and your creed? Have a care.

And you, who have great vineyards and press out the

juice of the grape—Oh, you sell the stuff away? You wouldn't have the wretched stuff around, because "Wine is a mocker and strong drink is raging." Oh, is it? I'm glad to learn that.

The money though, it is clean?

And you stand in the house of God and you say long prayers and you quote scripture; and you read beautiful illustrations in golden tones, and the world admires and worships you, at times.

But what about whited sepulchers?

Do you mean to tell me that it would be any more inhuman to strap that man up to a post, and bare his back, and give him forty good lashes which would only hurt his body for a few hours, than it is for that woman or that child to go with a broken body for the rest of a lifetime? Again, I say to you, have a care.

And you who talk of the working of the Holy Spirit on the heart, and wear sanctimonious faces and then go and set yourselves against a bar and drink and influence the manufacture and sale.

And you who hold your heads so high and virtuous in your own community and do, like a thief in the night, sneak away under cover of the dark that you may indulge your degraded appetites and then hold up your hands in protest, and lower your contemptible souls to that degraded pitch that you can find no higher aim in life than to be foul or besmirch the name of a good man, or the character of a pure woman. Remember that

"The mill of God grinds slowly,
Yet it grinds exceeding small;
With patience stands He waiting,
With exactness, grinds He all."

She bade the boy put on his coat and hat and gave him the sleeping child, then she took up the little Margaret, after wrapping her, covered her head, put on her own bonnet and shawl, and took up her package. Extinguishing the lights, and leading the way, she passed out of the house, closed the door and, without looking back, took her way out of the yard into the road toward Farmer Jim Beaton's.

Down the dusty road she went as fast as she dared go with the injured and laden boy. As they came to Mr. Beaton's house and were passing the barns there was a slight stir in the stable.

The boy murmured in a low voice, "Mother," and stopped. Oh, how that sound beat in upon his little boyish heart. Every animal in that stable was so dear to him, and now he was going away and something within him told him that he would never see them again. When they had left his home he had had no feeling of regret, for there he had known so much sorrow, but here, oh, here he loved everything on Farmer Jim Beaton's place and he knew everything loved him; there was Farmer Jim, and Mrs. Beaton, and Henry, and Shep, and for the first time the tears rolled down over his little wan face and he thought that his heart would break.

After a little he took up his weary way, toiling slowly up the hill that began to ascend from Farmer Jim's barn. Presently Margaret Raymond noticed that all was not right with the boy; from her abstraction she was recalled by the little sobbing sounds that were coming from him with every intake of his little chest.

She stopped short. "Boy, what is it?" she asked.

"My arm," was the reply, "it hurts me so where ——

where I fell, and it seems as if I could not hold her much longer. Oh, mother! What will we do? What will we do?" The childish voice near broke with the agony.

Quickly she dropped her bundle and took the sleeping child from him; then finding a seat along the road she bade the trembling boy to bring the package she had dropped, to her.

Laying the sleeping little one across her lap and still holding the other sleeping child upon her arm, with her now freed right hand she opened the bundle and, after a little search, found a small gray shawl that had been her mother's.

Laying the sleeping child from her arm along side the babe upon her lap, she made a little loop in the center of the shawl by folding it cornerwise, then laid the sleeping babe in it. Then she brought one end up over the boy's left shoulder, passing the other end over his right arm and bringing it up over the back of the same shoulder; then she adjusted it to his arms and fastened it, making thereby a little swinging cot which relieved the hurt arm almost entirely.

"There, Boy, isn't that much better?" she asked.

"Yes, mother," he replied, "now I can carry her real easy."

Then she raised the sleeping child up from her knee, and taking up her own and the boy's package they resumed their weary march through the dark and the dust.

After a long walk, without meeting anyone, they came in sight of the railway that lay about five miles from their home.

Now when Margaret Raymond left her home she had no plan in her mind as to what course she would pursue.

Her one idea was to get away from her husband as quick as possible, for the safety of her children and principally on account of the boy.

She knew the deadly hatred John had for him and so for that reason she resolved at once not to place his life or limb in any greater jeopardy whatever. Since John had seemingly determined to wreck his own life, she could not understand wherein it was her duty to allow him to wreck theirs also, and so to that end she had pursued this course, and that quickly.

Now, as she came in sight of the little station, the thought to escape by that way flashed into her mind; then quickly she remembered that the little waystation was closed early in the evening, and that nothing stopped there until morning. Also she realized that were she to attempt to remain there through the night her husband would, undoubtedly, on his return, endeavor to find them; that in his present condition he would leave no means in his power untried; so she decided to press on and trust whatever chances came.

As she came nearer she saw that a large freight engine was standing far up the track; and coming still nearer, she could discern the long freight train stretched out along the way, while far down the track, as her weary eyes swept the black forbidding line, she could see the lighted caboose.

Approaching now quite near the seemingly deserted spot, she could hear men's voices, and, stopping to listen, she was soon able to learn that some kind of an accident had occurred which they were hastily endeavoring to repair.

How long she would have to wait she had no means of learning, and not wishing to be discovered, she turned with the half-fainting boy and his burden down the southbound track, intending to go around the waiting train.

"It's an ill wind indeed that blows no one some good," and the circumstance of the closed station and cleared track, which meant hours delay, also proved her great protection; for there were no down trains, else this wretched little group of houseless, homeless wanderers must have been hurled into eternity without a moment's warning. "Surely God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb."

On through the night and the dark she staggered and stumbled over the rough, uneven roadbed, with the sharp stones and blade-like cinders cutting her bruised, tired feet most cruelly. But on she went unfalteringly, her one thought being to get away from her husband as far as possible.

Twice the boy would have fallen had she not dropped her bundles and caught him; the second time he seemed so near exhausted that for a moment she had to support him with her free arm. Already the sleeping child upon her left arm was beginning to hang like a dead weight, and unconsciously she looked about for some temporary support.

As her gaze swept up and down the road she became aware that the roadbed seemed rather more distinct there, and looking up saw that she had reached the lighted caboose. She went back to the rear end to the steps and without stopping to consider, realized that here was a possible resting place.

Quickly she lifted the almost exhausted boy up to the

high step and placed him on the platform; then she went back and picked up her bundles and climbed up to the platform herself. As she stepped past the semi-conscious boy she tried the door of the caboose only to find it locked. For a moment she stood with her white, drawn face pressed against the dingy, dusty glass, and looked at the comfort that lay just within, but which was denied her and her suffering little ones. Then she went back to the boy and lifting him and his load almost bodily, she helped him to the opposite side of the platform and seated him upon the top step so he could rest his feet on the step below; then she put the two packages behind him to help support him, after which she seated herself by his side; taking the little one from her left arm and shoulder she laid it across her lap; after which she drew her large shawl well up around the boy and herself, fastening it as best she could. As she clasped the sleeping child with her right hand there issued from her white drawn lips, a deep breath of relief, which was more like a moan.

Jerry Bond had had trouble with that old car before and why the company had persisted in sending that old box out on the road, delaying traffic, causing trouble, likewise fast ruining Jerry's fine disposition, was a thing he could not understand; after a time they got the damage repaired, and Jerry declared that he would throw up his job if they ever shoved that old thing off on him again. Then he signaled the engineer to go ahead slowly, after directing some of the crew to remain for a time with the damaged car.

As the caboose came along he swung himself aboard the front platform, signaled the engineer "All right," and went inside.

Going to his little cupboard, which was his desk as well, he made out his report for the accident and delay and putting it in his pocket, closed up the little aperture. After listening for a moment to the steady running of the train he became satisfied that all was going right; thereupon he stretched himself upon the long bench and was soon enjoying a comfortable and well-earned snooze.

How long he slept he never knew, but he started suddenly up, wide awake with the feeling that somebody was trying to smother him, and looking about, saw that the windows and doors were all closed and that the air from the heated stove was fast becoming stifling, which it was that had wakened him.

Staggering with the rolling and lurching of the train he made his way to the rear door, shot back the bolt and threw it wide open.

A great wave of fresh air rushed in as something dropped almost at his feet.

He looked down, then sprang back as if shot out of a gun, his eyes fixed with horror and affright upon the thing which lay across the threshold of the door.

Now Jerry Bond, albeit he was a rough fellow, was never known to have taken a drink of liquor in his life; now he pinched himself and rubbed his eyes to assure himself that he was awake; slowly he retreated half down the length of the car, never once taking his gaze from that coiling, twisting object.

At first he had thought it was a snake, then as the

first shock left him and he could begin to see more clearly, he perceived it to be a coil of woman's hair, and the in-rushing wind causing it to twist and turn gave it a weird and uncanny look.

For some moments he stood and watched it as it turned and twisted. Almost it seemed to beckon to him to come nearer.

Without removing his gaze from it, he groped his way to the little closet, found the button and opened the little door. Still watching, he fumbled about in the little boxes that served as pigeon-holes until he found a loaded revolver which he kept there; then he slowly made his way to the open door.

What would he find just outside?

He could not help but wonder.

He half lifted the deadly weapon and came nearer. Then he stopped.

He had had many strange encounters, but never anything like this. What was on the other side of that doorstep? He waited.

Should he call some of the crew? He hesitated. No, he would not.

Quickly he stepped in the doorway and levelled the revolver. "Hands up!" said he in a sharp, ringing voice.

No answer, only the rattle of the train and the rush of the wind.

At his feet lay the long coil of woman's hair.

The hand holding the deadly gun dropped slowly to his side as he peered sharply out into the night.

Nothing.

Then he looked down and saw that black coil on the

threshold at his feet; he had almost trod upon it. His eyes followed it out, and peering low down, he saw a dark, huddled, shapeless object on the top step of the platform, and as his eyes now accustomed themselves to the dim light, he could see the uncovered, bent head of a woman.

He stood for a moment as if turned to stone.

The sharp gusts of wind had tugged at her bowed head, and finally having torn her bonnet from its fastenings had hurled it away in the darkness; then gradually loosening the heavy coil of her hair had sucked it down against the door when it had blown the end in across the step as he opened the door.

Jerry's mind was in a maze. This surely was a new experience for him. A woman sitting on the back platform. Where had she come from? How long had she been there? Well, she could not remain there much longer, for he could now see, from the lurching of the train, that she swayed dangerously.

What should he do? Should he call some of the boys? He dared not. Suppose she were to lose her balance while he was gone. He dared not risk it.

How should he approach her? Suppose he should startle her and so precipitate her off the step. At the rate they were now going it meant certain death.

Cautiously he moved forward, clinging to the rail, and bent down over her crouching form. Slowly he put his hand upon her shoulder as he spoke.

She neither moved nor answered.

Lower he bent down, and peered into that ghastly white, staring face.

"Come, ma'am," said he, "you can't stay here; come,

get up and come inside. Here, let me help you." He stopped short and stared.

The woman had lifted her head and was looking at him with an awful look of dumb agony.

Jerry Bond almost lost his nerve at that look, then he pulled himself together with a mighty effort. "Come! come! ma'am," said he, "you can't set here any longer; here, come, let me help you inside.

No time for questions and answers now. Now he must act, and act quickly. He reached down with his arms to lift the woman, curling his leg around the railing to keep himself from pitching headforemost from the platform from the lurching of the train; he gave a mighty start, and swore under his breath, as his hand came in contact with a little warm face under the woman's shawl.

Reaching down in an agony of terror he caught the dark huddled mass in his powerful arms and dragged it forcibly back from its perilous position to the open door. With horror and amazement he gazed at the sight which met his eyes.

The large shawl had been thrown back by the hurried grasp and there on the platform at his feet they lay, the small unconscious boy and the almost unconscious woman, and across them the two sleeping children.

Quickly he picked up the sleeping form of the little girl who threatened, with every movement of the train, to roll from the mother's nerveless arm off the platform, and carrying her inside laid her, not too gently, down on the cushion he had so lately occupied.

Then he rushed back to pick up the little babe, but

finding it fastened so to the inanimate form of the boy, he gathered both up in his arms, and then dragged the form of the woman across the threshold; laying her down as gently as he could while he tried to get the little one out of the sling; succeeding finally, although by this time she had become thoroughly awakened and was screaming with fright.

Not daring to lay the unconscious boy down, he rushed over to the water pail and hurriedly dashed some cold water in the little pinched, white face on his arm.

Hurrying over to the long couch he laid the senseless little form down and loosened the band at the throat; then he brought some water to the dazed woman, who was beginning to rouse up from the cries of the child, and helped her to a seat near by; after bathing her face and head and rubbing her numbed hands he was enabled to leave her while he made his way back to the side of the unconscious boy. The little Beatrice screamed aloud as he came near her, and the cries of the child rousing the mother from her stupor she grasped the back of the seat in front of her and attempted to get to her feet, only to sink back almost fainting with pain and nausea; with a determined effort she tried again, and finally groped her way to the crying child, watching the man as he worked to revive the insensible boy.

Leaving the little one to sob out her grief, now she managed to reach the side of the man and with his help removed the coat and shoes and began to chafe the little cold feet and legs, while the man rubbed the little hands and arms.

The violence of the effort caused the circulation in her

own body to increase, and soon she began to feel her strength return.

The breath still refused to come back in the little frail body, and in an agony of terror, Jerry Bond suddenly pushed the mother back, and bending down grasped the little chest and shoulders in his great hands and forced every particle of air out of the little lungs; then as he bent the little shoulders back he filled his own mighty chest with air, and placing his lips to the cold, white lips of the child, he forced the air into that poor little chest; then quickly gathering him up in his arms he rushed to the open door and repeated it; after a little the little chest heaved and gasped. The awful struggle was on. The little life that had threatened to go out began to struggle back as Jerry Bond laid the little body down, the perspiration pouring down, as the tears streamed from his honest eyes.

Altogether, honest Jerry concluded that it had been about the most exciting and busy half hour he had ever experienced, and now that the more exciting part of the episode had passed he began to wonder who this strange party was and where they had come from.

That they had not been upon the car when he had fastened the door he was certain, neither were they, from all appearances, tramps, for their clothing, aside from the soil of the car floor and the dusty road, was neat and comfortable; and that reminded him that he had chanced to see some bundles when he drew the woman and children back from the platform, so he hurried to the door, which still stood open, to find them, but upon reaching the platform only one was in sight; he picked it up and assuring himself that that was all there was there he returned to

the car; although he felt sure that he had seen at least one other one.

Margaret Raymond was bathing the boy's face with cold water as he came up to her with the bundle, and just at that moment the boy raised his left arm to his head; the sleeve falling back as he did so, disclosed to the eyes of the wondering man a big black bruise on the white flesh.

Jerry bent down, and taking the little hand in his looked closely at it, and he wondered how that bruise might have come there. Running his finger lightly over the discolored surface he found it swollen and hard, then passed his hand along the bone to ascertain whether there might be a fracture also, but was greatly relieved to find that there was none.

He looked at the woman with a questioning look. Margaret Raymond, seeing the action and the look the man cast upon her, for the first time now looked full at him and said, "Sir, we are, as you see, in deep trouble; to save this boy further injury, even his life itself, I have—" she paused as if seeking a way to reply. Then she continued, "I have left all behind me and brought these children away."

Then seeing the questioning look still upon the man's face, her hands unconsciously fell upon the two little girls as she continued, "They are mine. I am their mother." Then she went on a little more rapidly, "Oh, sir, you perhaps have little ones of your own. Perhaps a little daughter. Perhaps a boy like this. Oh, sir, look at these helpless little ones and help us. I have some money," she put her hand within the waist of her dress and drew out

the little package of money. "I will pay you what I can if you will not put us off."

Jerry swore softly under his breath.

"Oh, please, sir," went on the woman, "don't put us off." Mistaking his meaning.

"There, there, ma'am!" said Jerry testily, "put up your money, no one's goin' to put you off this train. Not while I'm around." Then, as she hesitated, "Put up your money, this ain't no passenger train, 'n I guess this don't concern the company any. Where you goin' to? I take it your mighty anxious to get away from someone."

The woman nodded.

"Well, you see, we're due in Bart-Haven at ten-thirty, but that accident's put us back about an hour; but 'f you'r wantin' to keep away from someone, why Bart-Haven ain't no place 'tall."

Margaret Raymond was thinking rapidly.

"Bart-Haven?" said she. "Is that not where the fast express for New York stops?"

"Yes," said Jerry. "She's due there about twelve o'clock. But you couldn't —"

"Oh, I must!" she interrupted him. "If we can reach Bart-Haven in time to catch that train no one need know; oh, sir, help me, for the sake of your own wife and little ones."

"There, there, ma'am, you just make yourself comfortable, and them little ones; guess this one," indicating the boy, "'s comin' along all right; I'll do for you all I can. Ne' mind, now, ne' mind," as she would have made to express her gratitude. "Got some kiddies of my own,

ma'am, 't's all right," said he, patting her on the shoulder, " 't's all right."

At half-past eleven they rolled into Bart-Haven, and after discharging his duties Jerry took his little company of weary wanderers up to the station, and leaving them seated in a dark and secluded corner he procured the necessary tickets, with money taken from the little packet of Margaret Raymond's savings, and shortly after, when the great express had come in, and the conductor and trainman had stepped inside for orders, helped the weary little ones up the steps and into the luxuriously padded coach; got them safely and comfortably settled and made his way out by a rear door without having been seen by any of the crew.

In a few minutes the signal "All aboard" was given. The trainman swung aboard. The great express rolled out in the night and the dark, carrying with it Alfred Raymond into the sea of the great untried future.

CHAPTER VI

On through the night and the dark sped the Great Eastern express, bearing in its mighty embrace Margaret Raymond and her little homeless children.

After having been left by Jerry Bond safely aboard the luxurious train she busied herself in trying to make her children and herself as comfortable as possible, and when the conductor came through she was resting quietly against the back of the seat, half supporting Alfred in her arm; the two little ones lying on the forward seat fast asleep.

On, on through the night, hour after hour, they sped on their weary way.

The conductor, a kind-hearted elderly man, came back, after his trip through the train was completed, and brought some blankets, which he had secured from one of the sleepers ahead, and helped to make the weary little party as comfortable as he could for the long dreary ride.

Morning had broken long before they rolled into the great station of the metropolis, and gathering her little ones about her Margaret left the train and slowly made her way to the great waiting room, almost stunned by the tremendous uproar and confusion all about her. She was a simple country-bred woman and had never been in a great city before, and the noise and confusion seemed to bewilder and almost overpower her.

Carrying the little Beatrice upon her arm, with Alfred leading little Margaret by the hand, she sought a far corner

of the great room and sitting down tried to collect her scattered thoughts and form some plan.

During the early part of her hurried flight her one only thought had been to get as far, and as quickly as possible, away from her husband. What she should do after had not occurred to her. Now that she was brought thus face to face with all the difficulties of her position in this great confusion her heart sickened. It was all so new, so strange to her.

Where should she go for protection? To whom should she appeal?

She felt as if she were being swallowed up in some giant whirlpool. Her mind was, from the long strain imposed upon it, fast becoming a blank.

Little Beatrice, overtired and hungry from the long and rough journey, began to sob softly; Alfred and little Margaret tried to soothe her, but the child only cried the louder.

The hurrying, bustling crowd gave little heed to the party, except to wonder that the mother did not soothe and quiet the little one.

From out of her bewilderment Margaret Raymond realized that someone was bending over her and speaking to her.

She looked up and met a kindly pair of eyes looking into hers as she felt the stranger's hand upon her uncovered head.

The little one had ceased crying, and all three children were standing by with frightened faces. Mother had never been like this before, and the woman who was speaking to mother, she looked so strange; she was dressed all in

black and she had on a little black bonnet with such white strings.

After a little they all went with the strange woman out from the waiting room and then they got into such a queer wagon, it was something like Farmer Jim's big surrey only it was shut up all around, and a man sat way up on the top and drove. And the strange woman talked to mother, and mother talked now, and by and by they stopped before a big high house; and mother gave the man some money and then he went away. And then they all went in the house, and they waited while the strange woman went and found another woman, and they talked with mother and mother said yes. So they all went way, way up so many stairs, until there were no more stairs and the other woman opened a door into such a nice big room; and there was a smaller room off, and the sun shone in so bright, and you could look out of the windows and see, oh, my, of all the things you could see; and Alfred forgot that he was tired, and the babies forgot they were tired and hungry, for they thought they must be somewhere way up near the clouds; and then the woman who wore the little black bonnet with such white strings went out, and the other woman helped mother to wash and dress the little girls, and then the woman brushed mother's hair. Mother always looked so nice when her hair hung down all around her so. And the woman said, "What beautiful hair!" and mother looked up and smiled at her. Then he wanted to touch mother's hair again, mother often let him hold it in both hands, but there was more than he could hold; so he took it up now, and then he saw a very strange thing, there were so many white ones in it; he did not remember seeing any white

ones there before; but before he could say anything about it the other woman came back with something for them to eat, and said, "My! how nice you all look!" and mother smiled again and then they all began to feel much better.

And thus Alfred Raymond found a shelter after his brief, stormy experience.

The good Deaconess, who had found them so pleasant a home in the house where she also lived, soon ascertained that Margaret Raymond was a skilled needle woman, and soon she had all the work she could possibly do; which, together with the money she had saved, soon enabled her, by careful management, to keep her little family very comfortable.

Alfred was established in a good school not far away, and being a studious boy soon became rather a favorite with his teachers.

After becoming accustomed to the change after the splendid freedom of the country he gradually learned to adjust himself to his present surroundings.

On his way to and from school he noticed the boys who sold papers, and going to the teacher he asked her why they did it, and when she had explained to him how many of the boys of the school did the same thing, he determined to ask mother to allow him to do so. He could now remember a corner where many people went by, but he did not remember of ever having seen any boy there, and he was sure that that would be such a good place; why he could sell, maybe, as many as fifty papers there, and that meant, yes, that meant twenty-five cents; then he took his pencil and paper and he figured how much that would be for six days, and then for a month and then for a year,

and, and he was almost frightened. Why, he had never thought he could earn so much money. Oh! if school would only close so he could ask mother. Then he got so absorbed with the thought that the teacher had to ask him twice for the answer to some question, and then she came down to his desk and asked to see what had taken his attention from his lesson. So he showed her and wanted to explain, but she told him to wait until the session closed and then she would talk to him.

Then some of the scholars thought he must stay after school for punishment and tried to tease him, but he did not care, he began to feel so happy again. And then he wondered why the lovely bird in his throat did not flutter and beat as it used to when he felt so happy.

He never felt it now; often his throat felt, oh, so tired and sick. He wondered if the beautiful singing bird was dead. Then he began to feel that awful chill come over him, but just then his eye caught the figures on the paper and he forgot his sadness in this new joy.

By and by the great gong sounded, and the scholars trooped out, leaving him alone with Miss Burdick; then she called him to her and asked him to show her the paper; then she explained to him what he must do, and where he must go, in fact, she said she would go with him, if he wished her, to get his papers, that is, if his mother were willing.

In his eagerness to get away he nearly forgot to thank the teacher for her kindness, and then he remembered that his mother would not like him to do such a thing, so he came back, with his cap and book in his hand and his beautiful face flushed, as he said, "Please excuse me, Miss

Burdict, but I did not say thank you for being so good, and my mother wouldn't like it if she knew." And he put out his hand, which she took and held for a moment, and pressed in both of hers, as she said, "Good night, and God bless you, boy!" and she wondered what manner of woman this mother might be.

Out of the building and home he rushed as fast as his flying feet would carry him and could hardly wait to get up the stairs before he began calling for his mother.

Margaret Raymond came hurrying to the top of the stair, startled lest some calamity might have occurred.

The two little ones joined in the uproar and for a time confusion reigned supreme, for little Beatrice would be taken up, and must love Bobo, and little Margaret must also be noticed, until mother said, "Here, let mother have Beatrice," and then she held little Margaret with the other hand as she said, "Now, boy, tell me what is all this about papers, and corners, and people, and money."

And then he told her. At first Margaret looked very serious and shook her head, but he pleaded and showed his papers and his figures, and told her all the teacher had told him, and mother thought it over, then talked it over with the landlady.

Officer Danny O'Gorman had lately been promoted from the awkward squad from which, after having proven his efficiency, he had been given crossing duty at the very corner that Alfred had thought of as being a good working point.

Now, the reason for this place not being already pre-empted was, that when Danny first went on the force the newsies had guyed him most mercilessly, and all he could

do was to grin and bear it, but he vowed vengeance on any newsie that should come his way; so after having been appointed to this special place he had cleared every one off from his preserves. And where the newsies had so often hugged themselves with delight at being able to inflict so much torment, now they were, almost in reality, repenting in "sackcloth and ashes," for the corner under question was one of the finest working places they knew of and many indeed had been the friendly overtures extended to Officer Danny. But he was laughing best, for he was laughing last.

It was a busy Saturday morning. Officer Danny was immaculate from the top of his helmet to the sole of his polished boot; his buttons were ablaze with light and his clothes were spotlessly blue; under his helmet his handsome blue eyes and Irish face smiled upon the whole world; and altogether he felt very much satisfied with himself and the dignity of his position. 'Twas, as I have said, a busy morning. There were so many fine ladies out, and Officer Danny prided himself upon being such a great favorite with them, and this morning there seemed to be more than usual, and a thing that he had not noticed before was that so many of them carried a copy of the morning paper. Shure, now, he never remembered that the ladies ever bothered with the morning papers before. Shure, now, 'twas strange.

Just then he happened to look over to his particular corner. Immediately he straightened as if he had been struck a blow. Were his eyes deceiving him? They must be! He rubbed them to make sure. The sacred precincts of his territory had been invaded. Upon his

own particular corner was stationed one of the despised enemy, a newsie.

The other newsies had discovered him at almost the same time, and were losing no time in delivering their taunts and at the same moment hugging themselves in glee, anticipating the avalanche of woe and destruction when Officer Danny should pour out his vials of wrath upon the head of the unsuspecting newsie.

Officer Danny nearly disgraced himself; he actually swore; yes, sir, he really said "damn," and good Mrs. Prescott heard him and was terribly shocked, for she had always considered Officer Danny a very exemplary young man; for had he not always treated her with the greatest respect and shown her so much courtesy as he escorted her across the street? Of course, she knew that he recognized her superiority to the common crowd, but this morning he had actually sworn, and had grabbed her very unceremoniously by the arm and had hustled her across the street in a very undignified manner, and had said, "Hurry up, ma'am! Hurry up! Don't be dawdlin' along like an old woman." And he had landed her upon the other side very much perturbed, her bonnet all awry and very angry, protesting that he had treated her with as little courtesy as he would have shown to a newsboy.

And that was it, really it, all of this disturbance of Officer Danny's equanimity was caused by one little newsboy.

There came a little lull in the traffic; here was a chance, and Officer Danny moved quickly over to the violated corner, breathing out "threatenings and slaughter" as he went.

A woman was coming down the street. The slender little figure of the boy stepped forward toward her holding in his outstretched hand a paper; she shook her head and made as if to pass on, but happening to look into the upturned face of the boy she stopped, and taking out her purse accepted the proffered paper, dropping a piece of money in the outstretched hand. Quickly the boy handed back the correct change. She looked again and turned to pass on just as she met Officer Danny at the curb, and hearing the exclamation on his lips she turned to watch.

The boy was standing with his back toward the now thoroughly exasperated officer.

"Here, you impudent little vagabond! You make tracks out of this just as fast as your little legs will carry you or I'll ——"

The rest was lost in a confused jumble. For, as he dropped his hand heavily upon those slender shoulders, the boy turned and looked up, and the blue eyes of Officer O'Gorman met the grand golden-gray eyes of Alfred Raymond, and the soul of the man melted as ice melts before the sun.

For a moment he stood there as if paralyzed, almost unable to remove his gaze from those wonderful orbs and that beautiful boyish face.

Just then a party of people came forward, and to cover his confusion he caught three or four papers from the boy, saying, as he held them out, "Here, lady, buy a paper. Gents, have a paper. Look sharp there, boy, don't you see the people are all wantin' papers? Thank you, sir, thank you, ma'am. New at the job," nodding toward the astonished boy. "Just helpin' 'im out a bit. There!

that's the way to do it," said he, as he hurried back to his position on the crossing, leaving the boy staring after him for a moment as if bewildered.

Then a customer came up and asked for a paper and so, regaining his composure, he was soon busy disposing of his wares.

"Nice little fellow over on the corner," said Officer Danny to a party he was piloting across. "New at the job; help 'im out a bit. Nodding toward Alfred Raymond."

And so the morning passed. Once or twice Officer Danny hurried over to encourage the boy and show him some tricks of the trade, while the other newsies looked on in surprise and disgust, but not daring to offer any resentment.

At last the papers were all gone. Alfred stood for a moment, then stepped to the edge of the curb toward the officer.

Officer Danny came up toward the boy and then stopped. He looked into that beautiful smiling face and into those grand gray eyes, and then he lifted his hand and saluted. Why he did it he could not have told. The boy's little slender hand was lifted, the salute was recognized and returned, and in a moment he was gone.

Several times during the hours of that morning Officer Danny found himself thinking of the boy, and recalling the look of those wonderful eyes, and after a little he caught himself saying, "Like twin stars, like twin stars."

On the following Monday morning Alfred was early at his post, and disposing of his papers was off to school; after a while Officer Danny advised him to come out for the evening trade, and soon a strong friendship was estab-

lished between "Little Star," as the officer called him, and the officer.

Through the friendship thus established a large trade was built up, which continued for some time, and the amount of money earned by the boy was considerable, but his mother could not be prevailed upon to use any of it for her own use; on the contrary, she taught him to bank it and then let him pay his own expenses out of it, two lessons that were of incalculable benefit to him.

About a year after their arrival in the great city the little Beatrice was taken suddenly violently ill and after a short sickness died, and, oh, the sorrow of that little home, and the desolation the day mother took the little silent form away, while he and the little Margaret had stayed with the good Deaconess. After many days the smiles came back to his face and the cheerful laugh began to ring out again as of yore.

But the years moved on. He was growing older, and one day he failed to come to the corner with his great stock of papers as usual. Officer Danny had a tough time that day.

What had become of his boy Star? Was he sick? He could not understand. He hurried around and secured another boy to attend to the papers.

The next day he did not come. The new boy did the best he could, but the customers were uneasy; they had gotten used to looking for that bright, handsome face and happy smile that had always greeted them, and hearing Officer Danny call him by the name of Star they had naturally and easily fallen into the way of calling him the same until he became known by the name of Young Star.

But the boy was gone; he came back no more; and the new boy took his place. But the influence of that young life clung to the spot; many of the old customers stopped to talk about him; they recalled so many things now that he was gone, and gradually the new boy began to acquire some of the traits of Young Star, as they called him.

Officer Danny berated himself soundly for not having found out the real name of his young protege, and so when the day came that he was transferred from crossing duty to mounted service in the park he gave up the old place with a considerable degree of relief.

The reason for the sudden disappearance of Alfred was that, having grown to the years of a young man, and by hard work and study having finished his high school course, he was anxious to obtain some permanent employment so as to relieve his mother as much as he could, and one day he was called to the great house of VanDyke & Co. to assist with the office work, where by careful attention to detail and business he soon attained to an enviable position and became a valued and trusted employee.

Just at that time the good landlady, with whom they had lived so long, gave up her house, and so he with his mother and sister, who was now growing into a beautiful young woman, removed to another part of the city, where their joint incomes allowed them to live in a much more comfortable and private way.

To many the life and movements of Margaret Raymond may seem almost inexcusable, yet if any care to look beneath the surface I am sure none will judge her wrongly or harshly.

At times when the past had come up before her she had seriously asked herself the question, had she taken the wrong or the right course? Of her husband she had never inquired after having learned from Mr. Arnold, at the time she buried her baby Beatrice beside her father and mother, that he was then living with Jim and Mary Beaton; and some things that were repeated at that time led her to understand that John was living a very different life, for which she was very thankful; but being in no way a hypocritical woman she did not profess anything she did not feel.

When she considered her own changed life, and the change wrought in the life of the boy Alfred and his sister, she could not help but feel convinced that she had pursued the right course, although it seemed most drastic. But extreme cases often need extreme measures.

Her life and the lives of her children with her husband were positively destined to be wrecked, and no amount of reasoning could convince her that any such price should be paid, any such sacrifice made; and certainly every indication proved her judgment to have been correct.

With John in the home of Jim Beaton, with only the best influence about him, would have a natural tendency to check the evil that had so long dominated him. Then the influence that his children, and particularly Alfred, had in this childless home, brought him into an entirely new relationship with his own family, which relationship never having been acknowledged, appealed all the more strongly now that they were so thoroughly separated from him.

Upon learning from Mr. Arnold of the death of his little daughter Beatrice, he came thus into actual contact

with the first real grief of his life; and owing to the complete separation that existed between himself and his family, a separation which he was forced to acknowledge was entirely due to his own faults, brought the loss home to him all the more keenly.

As time passed on and every effort on his part to obtain any trace of the missing ones failed at every point, the utter rout of his selfish nature was completed.

Had they been dead and quietly resting in their graves he felt that he might have become, to a degree, reconciled, but the great uncertainty that overshadowed the whole miserable transaction slowly but surely destroyed every brutal, selfish trait in him.

The grand character of Margaret Raymond slowly, but surely, unfolded itself to his inner conscience until he began to wonder how she had ever borne with him the one-tenth part of all of his brutalities; as for the boy, upon whose innocent life he had vented the greater part of his devilish spleen, the memory of that beautiful, childish face, and happy singing life, was a constant reproach and shame; while the remembrance of that last scene with the boy and his mother haunted him with all of its hideous nakedness, and often threatened to overwhelm him; but the calm, steadfast friendship of Jim and Mary Beaton gradually succeeded in sustaining him through the fierce trial until his feet stood firmly upon the solid ground of a renewed and chastened manhood.

After some years he returned to his native place, and assuming control of the estate of his father, which had been all but wrecked by himself, he succeeded, by hard work and careful management, in restoring it to its former

prosperity; so that in time he became, while not a loved, yet a highly esteemed member of that community.

Between himself and Mr. Arnold, the man who held control of Margaret's property, there existed only the most formal civilities; and the only pleasure that seemed to enter into his lonely existence, was the task he assumed of caring for the little plot in the burying ground where was buried the little form of his baby daughter Beatrice.

Life at the old Beaton farm moved on in the same calm, uneventful track, after the violent upheaval and shock caused by the complete disappearance of Margaret and her children; and while Jim and Mary Beaton gradually resumed their accustomed routine outwardly, inwardly a great change had been wrought.

The sunshine of a great joy which had promised to irradiate their whole lives, had changed with almost lightning-like rapidity and left in its stead the deep impenetrable shadow of a great sorrow.

Toward the old dog Shep, Mary Beaton changed entirely; while before she had always valued the dog for his excellent qualities, now, for the sake of the boy, the old dog became her first thought; and when his days were ended she insisted that he be buried under the old maple tree in the yard where he had played so often with the boy; "for," as she said, "when old Shep was near, she somehow felt that maybe Alfred was not so far away after all."

Down by the corner of the barn Jim Beaton often stands in the dusk of the evening and looks along to where a little path once ran; and he sees the flash of a pair of little white legs and feet, all wet and glistening with the cold morning dew; the glow of a beautiful boyish face; the

flash of a pair of grand gray eyes. He feels again the ecstatic quiver of a little boyish form as it lay across his massive chest, held by his mighty arms, and he turns away with a sigh; for it has all passed like a dream, the boy come no more out of the silence, for —

There are hearts that ache,
And there are hearts that break,
That the old world knows not of;
But joy will return
To its own again,
In the heaven of God's own love.

CHAPTER VII

Mrs. Peter VanDyke left her carriage at the street corner, and bidding her driver to wait, took her way up the narrow street on foot; for, though the wife of one of New York's richest men, and a great social leader, she always avoided any unseemingly notoriety; and while her charities and kindnesses toward the poor were many, her right hand never knew wherewith the left had been busied; and so, knowing the propensities of servants to gossip, she always pursued this course when upon any mission of mercy bent.

Going quietly along the half deserted street, she saw approaching from the opposite direction, two little children, a boy and girl, seemingly about eight or nine years of age, rather poorly but cleanly clad.

As they were crossing the street ahead a man passed her, walking rather quickly, but being intent on watching the children, she did not at first notice him. As the boy attempted to step up the rather high curb from the crossing, his little smooth worn shoe slipped just as his entire weight was thrown forward, bringing the little limb down upon the hard, rough edge of the curb with most cruel force.

The face of the child went white as the little form wilted down and fairly shrunk together with the awful agony of the fall.

Just as a low moan issued from the white lips of the child a strong arm went around the slender quivering little

form, and crushed it against a strong manly chest; a strong white hand reached down and gently, but firmly, pressed the little bruised leg, thereby numbing the pain for an instant; a face was pressed to the quivering face of the child, and a soft, gentle voice murmured in the little ear, "Oh, I know it hurts just awful, just awful! but I wouldn't cry." And the cheek of the child was wet with the tears of the man.

Mrs. Peter VanDyke stepped into a doorway and watched the scene with considerable interest; for, noticing the man for the first time as he bent over the child, she recognized him as the chief clerk in her husband's office.

After a little he lifted the little fellow up and carefully set him upon his feet, saying something in a low tone, too low for her to catch, but the child smiled and in a moment passed on with the little girl who had remained standing quietly by.

As the children moved away Alfred Raymond, for it was he, turned to watch them as they went, and standing thus with the light full upon him, she was greatly shocked at the appearance he presented.

She saw at a glance that his clothing hung upon him in such a manner as to almost accentuate the look of emaciation of his form; his hands white and slender were almost of a transparent whiteness; his finely shaped, handsome face was almost bloodless, while those grand, golden-gray eyes seemed to burn with an almost unearthly light, giving to the face a weird, uncanny look.

For a moment he stood, then turned and went on down the street.

Mrs. VanDyke lingered for some moments, ponder-

ing in her mind the almost ghastly appearance of the man; slowly it dawned upon her that he was working himself near unto death. She knew her husband for a strict business man, but not for a hard driver, and so she was at somewhat of a loss to understand. Quickly dispatching the errand upon which she had come, she hurried back to her waiting carriage, and entering, directed the driver to drive quickly to her husband's office.

When Alfred re-entered the office, after having returned from transacting the business that had taken him out the morning of his encounter with the children, the page announced to him that Mr. VanDyke desired to see him in his private office; and as he was often sent for, he moved toward the inner office without word or comment. A brusque "Come in," came in response to his tap at the door marked "Private."

As he entered the door and closed it behind him, Mr. VanDyke looked sharply at him for the first time. The fact being that so long as his work was well done Mr. Peter VanDyke troubled himself very little about his employees.

Now Mrs. Peter VanDyke had been giving him a rather bad half hour, and so, thoroughly aroused and curious, it was with a considerable feeling of discomfort that he realized that all that she had been saying was only too apparently true, consequently he felt rather testy over the matter.

"Raymond," said he abruptly, "how long have you been with me?"

"Seven years," was the reply. Alfred looked inquiringly at his employer, but Mr. VanDyke avoided looking up.

"Feeling well?" was the next rather startling question.

"Why, yes."

"See here, Raymond! You've been working too hard, and I've been pretty busy myself and hadn't noticed, and the fact is, you're pretty nearly used up; and you're altogether too valuable a man to lose, so I've decided to give you a six months' leave of absence."

Alfred, swept off his feet for the first time, felt too weak to protest.

Mr. VanDyke was going on.

"Mrs. VanDyke has a brother in Arizona, on a ranch; and we have written him that we are sending you on; the letter will reach him by Saturday, and he will meet you at Balls Forks on Monday; to-day is Tuesday; can you be ready to start by Friday? Here is a list of the stops and changes you will need to make. Have you all the money you need to use? Come in and see me before you leave."

Short, sharp and decisive, Mr. VanDyke carried his point, but not once did he look into the grand gray eyes bent so wonderingly upon him.

Some years had elapsed since Alfred Raymond, with his mother and sister, had removed to that part of the great city where they had made a new home; and after having become settled, and finding himself financially enabled to carry on some branches of study which he was particularly anxious to pursue, he had not spared himself at all.

The memory of the wonderful voice which had been his as a boy, and a passionate love for music, had remained

with him always, while his great love for the mother who he almost idolized, and the sister whom he adored, together with his bright, beautiful disposition, had sustained him through many a dark hour.

In secret he mourned deeply the loss of his voice, but no word of complaint was ever heard to come from his lips. The wonderful character of Margaret Raymond seemed to have impregnated his whole being, though often there came a great longing to try to sing again; but upon having tried once or twice, and feeling the iron band that seemed to have been forged about that exquisite throat, he had resigned himself to the inevitable, feeling that he would never sing again.

But one night, upon being beguiled into attending the opera to hear the world-famed singer, Corina DelMere, woke all the old longing, with a greater intensity than ever before.

While all the world bowed in acknowledgment to this wonderful artiste whose notes and method seemed to have reached almost absolute perfection, yet all agreed that she was more a perfect instrument, an instrument without a soul.

As he pondered upon the subject, the thought of studying such a method would keep intruding itself upon his mind.

At first he scoffed at the idea, but the more he combatted it the more insistent it became, until one night he spoke of it to his mother.

Margaret Raymond, knowing him so well and knowing the painful loss his voice had been to him, had always been careful to avoid any topic that might lead up to the sub-

ject, now replied with some trepidation, when he came and seated himself at her feet as he often did and asked her advice upon the subject.

"What do you think you would like to do?" she had replied in answer to his question.

"Well," answered he, "I don't suppose that I will ever sing again." And he turned his handsome face away that she might not see the pained look that rested there, and which he could not suppress; "but," said he resuming, "I have thought that I should like to study the technique of the work, and know how it should be done, although I may never be able to do it."

For a moment she remained silent, letting her hand rest upon the bent, golden-brown head that leaned against her knee. "Well," said she at length, "I don't suppose there would be any harm in trying; but, Boy," said she, using the old, familiar, endearing term, "Mother does not wish to say anything to pain or discourage you, so forgive me if I recall unpleasant memories." He caught the hand that rested upon his head and pressed it against his lips as he said, "Let me hear it now, mother."

"You know the injury done you that night was most wanton and cruel;" she felt his hand clench upon hers sharply as she continued; knowing that, as now he had come to the years of manhood and understanding, the memory of that black night stood out in all its hideousness, "and," continued she, "the injury may be irreparable, and so I would advise you not to be disappointed if you should fail; but," said she hurriedly, "have you thought where you would go to study?"

"Well," said he slowly, "I know it is very foolish,

and I know that you will agree with me that it is, but I have thought of Mdlle. DelMere; she has a wonderful method; of course I know it is absurd for me to think that she would entertain such an idea for a moment."

"Yes," said his mother, "but since you feel that you wish to make such an effort, why, I think you are justified in at least doing the best you can, and surely the best is none too good when an honest endeavor is to be made."

A little later Corina DelMere, having a respite from her duties at the opera, was resting quietly in her luxurious apartments, when the maid brought in a card upon a dainty silver tray.

She took it up without comment and idly read the name.

Alfred Raymond.

For a moment she gazed at the little white square of pasteboard, almost with unseeing eyes; then, without thinking, laid it down.

The maid waited for a few moments and then spoke, "Mademoiselle does not care to see the gentleman?"

A vague insinuation aroused a little feeling of resentment in the mind of the singer, and without pausing to consider, she replied quickly, "Yes, Adelle, you may show him in here."

The maid retired and as the door closed upon her, DelMere repressed a strong inclination to recall her and direct her to say that she was not at home; but that veiled suggestion jarred upon her and she refrained.

In a short time the door again opened and the maid ushered Alfred Raymond into the presence of the great artiste.

Corina DelMere, without giving a thought to her appearance or the object of her caller, stepped forward to the middle of the room and stood directly under the light, then stopped. A successful singer, a great artiste, a beautiful woman, yet a woman almost without a heart; why she had consented to receive her caller she had not stopped to think. In fact the matter was to her of so little consequence that she had not deemed it worthy of a thought. She had moved forward more from habit than curiosity, and consequently felt absolutely no interest in the affair.

As her cold, indifferent gaze met those grand golden-gray eyes, all her coldness passed, all her indifference vanished away, leaving her feeling almost awkward and uncomfortable.

Struggling to regain her composure she murmured, "You wished to see me? Will you not be seated?"

With a quick, graceful movement, her caller wheeled a divan forward, saying, with a graceful bow as he did so, "After you, Mademoiselle."

As she sank into the seat, from her confused thoughts came this question: Who was this man with the face of a God, and the manner of a prince?

In all her life she had never experienced such a feeling as now passed over her. Her mind was in a whirl. She felt almost afraid. But the calm tone of deference and respect with which he addressed her reassured her and partially restored her control.

He was speaking with all the firmness of a man and all the naivette of a child. Fascinated, she could not remove her gaze from that beautiful face and those wonderful eyes.

He stopped speaking and was waiting for her to reply. "But," said she, struggling as in a maze, "I have never taught—I am afraid,—” she stammered,—he interrupted her,— she listened,— "Of course, Mademoiselle DelMere, I know that you will consider that I am most impertinent,—” she made a motion of dissent, "that I should suggest such a thing, but, but you have such a wonderful method, and I will tell you truly, I have," he paused as a dark flush swept over his handsome face, and he bent his head as he continued, "I have no voice, but I want very much to try—will you help me?"

His hands were held out in mute supplication.

For a moment she hesitated, then slowly she replied, "I will try."

"Thank you," said he simply, and at that reply the eyes of the great singer filled with tears; such tears as she had never known before.

"Of course," continued he, "we will have to make definite arrangements, and I wish to say right here that it will be very hard for you, for the voice that I have is very dreadful to hear, but I will do the best I can that it shall not shock you too much, but I would consider it unfair to you did I not explain all of this now."

Remaining a little longer, all arrangements were completed and Alfred Raymond withdrew.

Dismissing her maid for the night, Corina DelMere sat until late trying to solve the mystery that seemed to brood over the whole transaction.

A few days later the work was started, the usual order being laid aside, for Alfred at first refused to utter a note in the presence of his gifted instructress, preferring to work

upon theory and thought until he should dare to try for practical results.

The following week the bill opened at the opera with Faust with DelMere singing Marguerite; at first the great audience could not understand; DelMere was at the spinning wheel; there was a whisper over the great auditorium, "DelMere is singing!" now it was in the prison scene with Faust — "Thee I loved and only thee" — heads were bowed — she was singing, and the tribute was tears; at the finale such an ovation was given as has ever been accorded to but few. Corina DelMere was finding her soul.

Alfred worked incessantly, unfalteringly; a little ground would be gained, then, like a house of blocks, the whole structure would fall to pieces; then, after a short rest, with unfaltering courage he would rise, and from the ruins begin to build again; again a little higher ground, only to fall down again, until it was almost pitiful. His endeavors seemed doomed to everlasting disappointment; once Mdlle. DelMere implored him to stop, saying that he could not succeed; the voice would not yield. But the dogged persistence of the man beat down all opposition, and he set his face to the one object, to succeed or break in the endeavor. And now, after some years of the most heartbreaking effort, with success showing faintly on the dim horizon, his impaired strength was threatening disaster, almost at the very point of success.

And so, after his encounter with Mr. VanDyke, too weak and exhausted to resist, he found himself aboard the Great Chicago Flyer three days later, separated for the first time from his mother and sister, speeding toward the great west, too wearied to even wonder what the future might hold in store for him.

CHAPTER VIII

Up a superb sweep of avenue in the beautiful city of Carodina, upon a slight eminence, stands the Imperial palace of the Emperor Paul, the most magnificent royal residence in the world.

The fluted columns of purest marble spring a hundred feet in the air and glisten in the sunlight with a strangely white and sinister appearance.

Pillared like Karnak itself, it stands one of the greatest wonders of the age.

It is night. A pale moon covers all like a beautiful veil. The Imperial palace stands out weird and ghostly. The little waves of the harbor sparkle in the moonlight as they lap themselves against the city walls.

Sentries are upon guard at every point. The city is hushed, stunned.

Within his splendid apartments the Emperor, a stern and haughty man of about seventy, sits alone. His proud head held rigidly erect; his fierce eyes gleaming.

He has been smitten to the soul; but not for one moment will he flinch or falter.

Alone in all his splendor and grandeur, he is reaping the fruits of the past hardness of his selfish life.

Feared and hated by all, crushing all who opposed him in any way, he found himself in the present bitter moment, alone.

The past 'rose up before him in dim, ghostly array.

He saw himself as he ascended the throne after his father, Philip the Cruel, at a very early age.

Flattered, courted, every detestable trait developed to the extreme, it was not long before he became the most loathed and hated man in all Europe.

But two people had ever had the courage to oppose him, the Empress, his wife, and the widow of his brother John; Miriam, Archduchess of Ainhault, and Princess of Polen, who had flouted him at almost every turn.

The Empress; how he hated her. She had conquered him as she had said she would. He thought of her now as he had thought of her when they had brought him the first word of her, the daughter of that old Northern King, and almost religious fanatic, how he had hated him; how they had called her the most beautiful woman in all Europe. He remembered how, when he had sent his ambassadors to that Northern Country, desiring the hand of the proud, beautiful Princess in marriage, she had sent back his messengers with the reply that, "she would prefer to be burned at the stake, than unite her life with that of the vilest rascal and fiend in all Europe."

His face burned again as he recalled that reply; a reply that had held him up to the whole world as an object of ridicule and scorn.

He recalled how he had set himself to secure this woman by fair means or foul. How he had sworn to humble her as she had humbled him. How he would drag her pride in the dust as she had dragged his pride in the dust. If he were the vile creature she had named him, then he would make her the mate to that vileness, and thus make her the scorn of the whole world. He would make it

appear that for the position he could bestow upon her as Empress, that she had been willing to forfeit everything to her ambition. So to that end, with all the vile cunning of his nature, he prepared himself to overcome this innocent and unsuspecting girl.

Knowing her father and herself for deeply religious people, he prepared himself along every religious line that lay in his power.

Possessed of a more than ordinarily attractive appearance, he could assume a seeming spiritual demeanor that he was far from possessing. Armed with letters of introduction from some of the greatest people of his court, he had sought that northern country, and with extreme caution presented himself at the simple court of that honest old Patriarch of the North.

With all the cunning he possessed he laid siege to the affections of that Northern Princess whom he found even more beautiful than rumor had said, so that now he desired to win her more than before.

The seeming nobleness and gentleness of his character, together with his princely gifts toward the poor of her people, whom she loved deeply, won the beautiful girl, and the time came when the union between the two was indissolubly forged.

A few months of happiness on the part of the unsuspecting Princess, and artfully concealed weariness upon his part, when he proposed to take his beautiful wife away to his country.

The day of parting came; the Princess had never been separated a day from the father she so passionately loved, and as she knelt to receive his blessing, she drew him down

to whisper in his ear, through her tears, the happiest secret a woman can have, to tell to him who had been both father and mother to her, that before she should see him again, her own little babe would be born.

He remembered the day he had brought her to his home, if this magnificent pile could be called a home; the look of wonder upon her face, the bewilderment; until after escorting her to her own apartments, she had seen the royal insignia over all, when the truth burst upon her like an avalanche.

Why was it that he would remember that day so distinctly? She was standing in the midst of the magnificent salon of her private apartments. She had looked around in some bewilderment. Then she had looked at him, and at the look in those beautiful gray eyes he had shrunk back.

He could hear her now, in that terribly colorless voice ask him one question.

"Who are you?" And he had not dared to refuse to reply; nor yet had he dared to lie; so, with all the bravado of his old spirit he had replied, "I am the Emperor."

"And I?" The question could not be evaded.

"You are the Empress." She had gone white. For a moment he had thought that she would die. But she was a Princess, daughter of a hundred kings. She stood for a moment as if carved from alabaster; so pure, so white, so terrible she looked. Then she turned to him, and spoke, and her words pierced him like a two-edged sword, for, strange as it may seem, he had come to love this proud, beautiful woman with all the strength of his brutal, selfish nature; and now that she would give him an heir soon had only intensified that passion.

“You have done the foulest thing that man can do to woman. You have deceived me as never woman was deceived before. You have made me, a pure woman, the mate of the foulest beast that ever contaminated God’s holy, beautiful earth. You have made me a shame before all women. I, the daughter of a hundred kings, am made the mate to a consort of harlots and concubines. You have bowed my face in the dust. Well I know that I am your wife, and the Empress, and must become the mother of your son. Before the world I will appear as such, but between us there will be no relations; remember that I am your wife in name only, so far as God’s holy law will allow. I pronounce no curse upon you; I leave that to your own filthy, guilty conscience. And now, go; and never pass that threshold again until I send for you.” And slinking with shame and degradation, he, the mighty Emperor, had crept away, flayed as never man had been flayed, by the tongue of a woman, and that woman, his wife, and Empress.

How he hated her now. He recalled how she had sent for him, as she had said she would. She had lived her life apart from him. When occasion required she had appeared with him in public, and the people worshipped her, their beautiful Empress. She cultivated a disposition and character that was marvelous. She sang, her voice was beautiful; she laughed and was gay with her attendants; she worked incessantly among the poor and lowly; the sick and afflicted; she strove to pour all the beauties of these virtues into the life that she knew must come from hers.

And then had come that last day. She had sent for him and, not daring to refuse, he had gone. Upon the

silken furnishings of her great bed she reclined against the matchlessly wrought pillows. Her exquisitely beautiful face was pale with a deathly palor. Her fair, golden hair, in two massive braids, lay adown either side of her. Her beautiful gray eyes shone with an unearthly lustre. In the presence of this woman, this woman whom he had so foully betrayed, he felt abashed and ashamed.

As he entered the room she told her attendants to lift her up. She addressed him as from some great height. "I have sent for you," he could hear her words now; "I have given you a son; see to it that you rear him well; see to it that he follows not in his father's footsteps." Then she spoke to another attendant, "Lift up the child." They did so. "I leave him with you; look well to it that you do not betray my trust, for I go from you now, but I shall return; and from the grave, through him, I will strike you as you have stricken me; I will break you as you have broken me; I will lay your face in the dust as you have lain mine in the dust; now go."

An hour later they brought him word that she was no more.

And was this what she had meant? Only that morning he had had a stormy scene with that son, a man grown now, and steeped in all the vices of his day.

The nation had demanded that a wife be chosen for him; they desired an heir to the throne. To be sure there was John of Ainhault, but John of Ainhault did not seem to care for women; and the people had not forgotten their beautiful Empress, whom they had idolized, despite his efforts to drag her down in their eyes; the more he had striven to lower her, the higher she had risen. They had

been sorely disappointed in her son; in fact, they had lain all his shortcomings at the Emperor's door.

So he had called his son to him that morning and expressed the wish of the people. The Crown Prince had remained sullen; the Emperor had then commanded him to quit his gay companions, as already his ambassadors were on their way to a foreign court to arrange for a union for him with a Princess of another house. Then the Crown Prince had replied, saying, that if he could not "wed the woman of his choice, he would not wed at all." Adding that as his "father, the Emperor, had chosen his own wife," he should do the same. To which the Emperor had found no reply; and in such wise were his own outrageous acts, and betrayal of his Empress, the mother of his son, being used against himself, like a lash and a scourge.

The Emperor had threatened to banish the woman who had infatuated him, with all of his companions, unless he consented to obey the mandate set upon him by the court. The scene ended by the young man consigning the whole court and Empire to the Infernal regions before he would give up one of his chosen friends, and, hurling himself out from the Imperial presence, had mounted his horse and, joining his companions, was off on a wild ride through the mountains.

And now, dark, black night had fallen down upon all.

Down in the great Imperial chapel lay the body of the Imperial heir, crushed and dead. Riding alone with the woman of his choice, his horse had made a misstep, and horse and rider had gone over the awful precipice to his death.

And the mighty Emperor sat alone in the midst of the

ruin of all his hopes and plans. Was this what the Empress Mother had meant? He shuddered.

At last he rang a bell.

An attendant answered.

"Send Miron to me."

The attendant withdrew.

A few minutes later Col. Miron entered and saluted.

"Miron," said the Emperor, "where have they lain him?"

"In the Imperial chapel, Your Majesty," was the reply.

"You have gotten the details of the accident?"

"As far as I was able, Your Majesty."

"And they are?"

"His Highness, the Crown Prince, met the party as previously arranged ——."

"And that party?"

"Were Prince Vladimer, Duke Auerlo, and several of the younger set, with Baroness Sophie, the Countess Zetta ——."

"That woman!"

"Yes, Your Majesty; it appears that His Highness and the Countess were riding considerably in advance of the rest of the party, when those coming behind were roused by the screams of the Countess. Riding furiously forward they met her, frantically urging them to hurry, as the Prince had gone over the precipice, his horse having stumbled."

"Is that all, Miron?"

"No; it seems that His Highness and the Countess had had a quarrel."

"Probably told her what I said this morning," said

the Emperor, grimly. "You say they have carried him into the Imperial chapel?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Attend me. I will go there."

Col. Miron saluted as the Emperor passed before him, then turned and followed.

Down the great corridor, past innumerable suites and apartments to the grand staircase, they passed, a grim, silent pair; but instead of going down the latter, the Emperor turned aside, and drawing aside the tapestry, disclosed a small private staircase that led to an almost unknown passage, which, in turn, led into the chapel by a private entrance; through this they passed without encountering the sentry at the door.

The beautiful chapel was but dimly lighted, in fact, the greater light came from the candles upon the altar.

From where they stood at the left, they could see the black draped bier upon which rested the remains of the Crown Prince.

The Emperor put his hand upon the shoulder of Col. Miron, and together they moved forward. Just as they were approaching the body, their attention was attracted by a slight movement outside the main entrance to the chapel.

The Emperor stopped to listen; there were sounds of an altercation of some kind.

Motioning Col. Miron to follow him, he stepped into the heavy shadows behind the velvet hangings of the transept, yet in a position to see plainly without being seen.

For a moment all was silent; then, down the center

aisle could be seen approaching through the gloom the figure of a man.

Before reaching the body he stopped and peered around through the shadows. Satisfying himself that he was alone, as he had dismissed the guard at the entrance, he stepped forward and came in full light of the candles that stood at the head of the bier.

As the man came thus in the full light, the Emperor gave a start of surprise as he recognized the face of his brother, the Archduke Walther, and his mind was filled with the wonder as to what could have induced him to come to this place at this hour of the night.

The Archduke stood for a moment motionless gazing down upon the rigid features before him, and the Emperor was startled as he saw the look of fierce, malignant hatred that distorted the features of his brother.

Slowly the Archduke bent forward.

Lower and lower his face sank, until only a few inches separated it from the face of the dead man.

The Emperor, hardened as he was, could scarcely repress a shudder at the sight of that face, which, bending down with fiercely parted lips, showing the strong white teeth, gave to it a look of frightfully wolfish ferocity.

For a moment he neither moved nor spoke. An uncanny stillness rested over all. Then they saw his lips move. They heard a sound like the hiss of a deadly reptile.

"So! So!" Through the ghostly silence of the deserted chapel the sound seemed intensified a hundredfold.

The Emperor had laid his hand upon the arm of Col. Miron with a grip that seemed almost enough to crush it,

yet in the intense interest neither were aware of the strong excitement that controlled them both.

"So! so!" said he again. "This, then, is the end! For this I have schemed and wrought, and striven. To be brought to nothing at last. All of my plans, all of my toil, all of my years, all for nothing." Through the dim, ghostly silence of the deserted chapel that horrible bloodcurdling sound, that deadly hissing was indescribable. Lower sank that fiendish, wolfish face. Nearer to that of the dead man. The eyes blazing with a fierce, maniacal light, seemed endeavoring to pierce that death-white mask as if they would reach the soul of the dead man itself.

"You miserable, black-hearted whelp of hell."

Col. Miron made as if to interfere, but the Emperor restrained him. There was some dark secret buried here that would need to be unearthed, and the best way was to let matters take their own course.

He was going on.

"It was for this that I sent your mother to an insane cell at Rildorph? It was for this that I stole the Emperor's son away, and placed you in his stead, that you, my son, might come to the Imperial throne? Curse you! Curse you! Curse you!"

Low, deep, and fierce, he hurled the imprecations into the face of the dead man.

The Emperor seemed paralyzed at the fiendish sight.

"It was for this that I risked my life, and crossed the sea to put his child forever out of reach, that you, my son, might rule in his stead? It was for this that I risked all, only to be cheated at the end by you? You cur! You snake! You viper!" and in his maniacal rage, he raised

his hand and smote the dead man in the face. Again he raised his clenched fist, when he felt himself gripped with an iron hand.

"Hold! In the name of God, what are you doing? Are you mad?"

"Merciful heavens! the Emperor!" said he, as he cowered down before that awful sight. His brain reeled. Like lightning his mind worked. How much had the Emperor heard? How much did he know? He shuddered.

The Emperor spoke.

"What does this mean? What was this man to you? What did you mean by calling him your son?" The Emperor seemed possessed of the strength of twenty men, as he crushed him back against the rail of the altar. His terrible eyes seemed to go down into the very soul of the man and drag his guilty secret from him. "Tell me," said he fiercely, "what was this man to you?"

"He is my son," came the gasping reply.

"Your son!" almost shouted the Emperor. "Where, then, is my son? Tell me, or I will tear your black heart out and trample it under my feet."

"Mercy! mercy!" cried the miserable man before him.

"Mercy!" hissed the Emperor. "What mercy have you shown to me or mine, that you dare ask for mercy now?"

The other cowered down, shivering as with an ague.

"Tell me," said the Emperor, pointing to the dead man, "Did he know this?"

"No," was the reply, "no one but his mother and I."

"And it was that which destroyed her reason?"

"Yes."

The Emperor flung his brother from him as if he had been some deadly viper, where, at the very foot of the altar he lay, half stunned. Then, turning to Col. Miron, he said, "Miron —"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"You have heard?"

Miron bowed, speechless.

"Call a guard, and have this body removed to Rildorph, and buried there. Bring him," indicating the Archduke, "to my apartments, and then send for John of Ainhault." Then turning, he strode down the aisle, and returned to his own apartments by way of the grand staircase, where, upon reaching them, he found himself in almost as awkward a position as before, in fact, more so; for, in the event of the death of the Crown Prince, John of Ainhault stood next in line, and the wheels of state would roll on without any seeming jar or disturbance whatever. Now from what he could gather from the wild, incoherent speech of his brother, the real heir to the throne had been carried away in infancy into that new country of the West, which he detested, and associated in his thought with slaves, plebeians and barbarians. In that case, suppose the rightful heir should have survived, what manner of man would or could he be?

At that moment a page announced John of Ainhault.

"Admit him."

The latter entered and saluted.

"John," said the Emperor, "I presume you are surprised that I should send for you at this hour of the night, but I have some very strange and important news to com-

municate to you, and the sooner you hear it the better. Be seated."

The latter sat down.

"In the first place, I wish to warn you that it is very shocking, and pertains to the death of the Crown Prince."

John of Ainhault did not take his eyes from the speaker's face.

"I learned to-night," continued the Emperor, "that the Crown Prince, or supposed Crown Prince Raoul, was not my son —"

"Your Majesty! What do you mean?" gasped the young man. "Not your son? Who was he then?"

"He was Walther's son."

"Walther's son!" ejaculated the young man. "My uncle!"

"Yes, but hark, they are bringing Walther now! Compose yourself, we will now try to get to the bottom of the matter."

A page entered and announced Col. Miron and the Archduke Walther.

"Admit them."

John of Ainhault, observing the Archduke closely as he entered, attended by Col. Miron, saw the look of fear he cast upon the Emperor and the general air of dejection.

Then the Emperor addressed himself to his brother. "Now you may tell us the whole miserable story. You said the dead man was your son, and that you had carried my son away. Make no reservations or palliations whatever, all I want is the plain, unvarnished truth. Go on."

The Archduke seemed unable to proceed. Finally Col.

Miron poured some brandy from a flask and gave it to him; after a little he told his story in a half broken, wavering manner. They did not interrupt him.

"When the Empress died and left her little son so unprotected, the thought came to me, what a chance for me to put my son upon the throne; I knew how careless attendants were so I felt that I had little to fear from that source. The only one I had to fear was my wife, so I took her away to Rildorph and then I changed the children, as my son was about the same age as the Crown Prince. When my wife learned that the child she was nursing was not hers she sent for me and demanded her son; I told her that her son was dead; she refused to believe me, declaring that she would appeal to the Emperor. Fearing her threats I had her confined, and gave out the report that her mind had given way, the shock of the sudden death of our child being the cause. In the midst of the confusion thus precipitated, she was stricken with brain fever, which shattered her mind. Leaving her in the care of a faithful attendant and nurse, I took your son, whom I felt it was dangerous to allow to remain in this country, and, under the plea of traveling for my health, I obtained permission from your Majesty to go upon the continent, but instead I took ship for America. There I left him and returned and no one suspected my errand. The rest you know."

"Your Majesty," said John of Ainhault, "this is terrible! I have never heard anything like it! What steps will you take to find this child, your son?"

The question acted as a relief to the overwrought brain and nerves of the Emperor and set his mind to working in a different channel. At the suggestion to find the

rightful heir to the throne, his thoughts caught at it as a drowning man will catch at a straw.

"Yes! Yes!" said he, "he must be found! Tell me," said he, turning to Walther, "you know where you left him?"

"I did not stop to inquire the name of the people, but I can go to the place again."

"Enough," said the Emperor, "call the guard. Miron, he is your prisoner," indicating his brother. "I hold you responsible. Attend to him and return at once."

Col. Miron saluted and left the apartment with the Archduke and after a few minutes returned, and all arrangements pertaining to the search were completed.

In the gray dawn of the early morning the Emperor stood at the window of his great salon. All night long he had not once closed his eyes. They in their fierce intensity had endeavored to pierce into the future. He had been assailed by a hundred doubts. Above all the thought had been that his son, the son of his beautiful, disdainful Empress, still lived; and the strange part was that, from the day she had bade the nurse lift up the child, he had not so much as laid his eyes upon him. Was this what she had meant by that last warning? Already he could hear the whisperings and wonderings of his people. His people? He would crush them did they dare censure him, but the rest of his great world, how could he deal with them? And with that thought his hatred grew. Hatred toward the Empress who had so effectually scorned and despised him. Hatred toward the son he had almost never

seen. Hatred for the man who was dead, and who had given him so many uneasy hours; and bitter, deadly hatred toward the brother who had brought about all this confusion. In seeking to fix the blame for it all the mighty Paul overlooked the most important fact, and the key to the whole situation, and that was, that, had he himself been one-hundred part the man he should have been, all of his present loneliness and discomfort might have been avoided.

As to this child whom they had gone to seek — Child! why he was not a child, he was a man, that is, if he were still alive — Ah! suppose he were not alive! Suppose he were dead! Almost he wished he was dead. If he was dead it would simplify matters very much. John of Ainhault would be the Crown Prince. John of Ainhault would have to set aside his indifference toward women and marry, and so provide an heir to the throne that the line of the mighty Philip should remain unbroken. Then doubts began to assail him. Suppose the child should have survived and come to manhood, what manner of man must he be? There were none but boors, plebeians and barbarians in that land of new growth; like the mushroom or other fungi, it was only at best a parasite; and his brow grew dark as he tried to picture what this man could be like. But all shape, all form avoided him. His inability to pierce the veil of the future lashed him at every turn.

He sneered at conscience, but conscience stung him at every point. Turn whichever way he would, her sharp, needle-like thrusts pricked through the joints of his pride and strength until he found her almost unbearable.

"I will come back as from the grave, and through him I will strike you as you have stricken me; I will break you as you have broken me; I will lay your face in the dust as you have lain mine in the dust."

Those words seemed burned into his brain as with a hot iron, and they blistered and scorched the very soul of him.

Was it true what she said? He could see her now as he saw her then. He could hear those deep bell-like tones now as he heard them then.

When the supposed Crown Prince was killed he had felt almost relief, for he believed that he was about to be freed from that awful imprecation; but now he was caught in the toils like Laocoon of old, more firmly than ever.

And this boor, this barbarian who was coming, what would he do with him? He began to hate him afresh. What would he do with him? Up in the apartments that had been occupied by the Empress mother was a magnificent picture, life size, of the Empress in all her exquisite beauty. In spotless white from head to foot, crowned only with her beautiful, fair golden hair, she looked all that she was, a Royal Princess, daughter of a hundred kings, and an Empress direct from the hand of God, as she had been God's true handmaiden upon earth.

Yes, he knew she was a pure and holy woman, and he hated her all the more for that.

Ah! He knew what he would do; he would command that those apartments should be prepared for this creature that was to come. He should be flung, so to speak, in the very midst of all that magnificence and exquisite luxury that had so helped to adorn the beauty of the woman he

now so bitterly hated. Had adorned? Curse her! It had not adorned her, she had adorned it.

He should be brought face to face with the great beauty of the mother who bore him; this great, awkward, uncouth gawk; who knows, maybe the spirit of the Empress still flitted through those rooms; if it did it would see this creature of hers and mayhap cause it to feel shame.

He should rest upon the very bed in which he had been born. His awkward, uncouth head should press the dainty silken pillows hers had pressed. He, Paul, would show them whether they would lay his face in the dust.

Somewhere he had read or heard of visiting the sins of parents upon the children. Yes, that was what he would do; he would visit the shortcomings of the Empress toward him, upon her son, until he would wish to flee to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Filled with his dark and evil thoughts he gave orders that the apartments of the Empress should be prepared for the man who was to come; but that nothing that had been used should be removed, only such things added that the coming man might need.

So, brooding over the affair, he shut himself in his apartments, going out only when affairs of state required it.

While he still lingered at the window, in the gray of the early morning, two great ironclads, veritable floating fortresses, slowly took their way out of the beautiful harbor on their way to sea.

Strange rumors began to circulate. Mere whispers. John of Ainhault was gone. Col. Miron was gone. The Emperor's brother, Archduke Walther, was gone. Admiral Sefton and the Emperor's own physician, Sir Isaac

Davis, and several other important men were gone. Two of the great battleships had departed secretly. The Emperor had shut himself up in his royal palace. The Crown Prince's body had been taken away by night. Hush! Don't whisper it, but 'tis said 'twas not the Crown Prince, 'twas Walther's son. What! Walther's son? Yes, the Crown Prince had been stolen when an infant. You don't say so! Yes, and carried away to America. What! To that wild country? Yes, and they have gone to find him. To find him? And bring a barbarian to rule over us? Why they say the people there are all savages! Oh, no, not savages. Well, little better.

And so the rumors ran, wilder and still more wild, and no one could tell how or where it would end.

CHAPTER IX

In his compartment of the luxurious sleeper Alfred Raymond sat half unconscious of the rapidly changing scene as the train sped up along the Hudson.

With eyes half closed and unseeing, feeling only the deadly heaviness of an overpowering weariness that began to threaten to engulf him, he reclined against the back of the seat as the hours passed, nor seemed to move.

At last, after some hours, roused somewhat from the painful weariness that oppressed him by the porter, who, becoming anxious, had approached and requested to be allowed to serve his meals to him in the sleeper, he turned toward the window, after having dismissed the man, saying that he wished nothing, and was again sinking back into the same condition from which he had been almost painfully drawn, when his eyes, half seeing the landscape which seemed to flit by the window, caught and held some half familiar, half forgotten scenes.

Some far-distant wooded hills, then a distant view of a narrow, ribbon-like, dusty road stretching away toward the forest-covered hills.

Half unconsciously he leaned forward and looked intently upon the scene.

From different indications he could see that they were approaching some stopping point, yet the great flyer did not abate even a little of her speed.

Now, thoroughly aroused, he leaned forward, his

beautiful, cameo-like face almost pressed against the window.

Only a short space of time had elapsed since he had been threatened by a complete collapse. Now he leaned forward motionless, every muscle set, every nerve taut. His lips parted, through which the breath was now passing with a fierce intensity.

What had happened to so thoroughly transport the man from an almost death-like stupor to a fierce, living activity?

With a scream and roar the train tore past the little wayside station.

Alfred, leaning intently forward, caught a confused outline of the place; only in the midst of the blurred scene the little white swinging sign stood out clear and distinct with the name of the station in bold black letters.

Almost at the same instant the car dashed across the white dusty road, and he caught one fleeting look as it stretched away to the west.

For a few minutes he seemed to have lost consciousness, then he began slowly to return to life.

What was it?

He felt as if some hand had struck him a terrible blow in the chest.

He had been leaning forward, looking for he knew not what.

When he recovered his thoughts he was leaning, white and spent, against the back of the seat.

His confused thoughts began to rearrange themselves, and clearly now he could see the one word that had changed for him the whole journey; the one word that

had in an instant swept away the intervening years and carried him back to the years of his childhood.

And that one word, the name of the little wayside station through which he had just passed, "Bentwell," together with the fleeting glance of the narrow dusty road, as it stretched away toward the distant hills of Bentberg, were the powerful influences that had wrought this sudden and timely change.

The years that had elapsed since the night of their hurried and painful flight had been so filled with the duties that had followed so quickly that they had succeeded to a very great degree in deadening the pain of parting with the past and its many pleasant as well as unhappy memories.

Now these were all obliterated and only the past remained.

Sharp, distinct and clear the memory of that unhappy night stood out before him.

The present had suddenly ceased. His surroundings were as if they had not been. He was living again in the past.

Back over the dusty road he was retracing the steps of long ago. The painful burden of the sleeping child again hung heavily down from his young shoulders.

Then he felt with a keen pain that that little sister had been asleep these many years in the village churchyard. Again he descended the hill to Farmer Jim Beaton's barn and he was standing outside in the darkness listening to the familiar sounds from within.

Again he felt himself vaulting over the rail fence that bounded the great meadow, the delightful shock of the cold morning dew on his little bared feet and legs.

Now he heard the old dog barking as he came running to meet him. He could feel the warm, soft feel of Old Shep's beautiful collar as they raced across the great meadow in wild, exuberant joy.

Now he was coming up the path that led from the barn to the house, and there was a smile upon his handsome face, as in the vision of the past the happy boy looked up and saw those dear ones waiting for him.

• Now he was in the present; and his thoughts were sad.

Where were those loved ones now? Had they forgotten? The thought was a painful one. He put it away. Or did they remember? He had remembered, at times, even when his mother had thought he had forgotten.

What was this? The past and present were coming so close together.

He knew he was sitting in the great flyer speeding into the west, yet he could feel the warm, loving embrace of good Mrs. Beaton and hear her dear voice again.

Now he felt himself lying across a great manly chest closely held by a great strong arm; and at the feel of that arm as it held his little warm boyish form clasped in close, loving embrace, his eyelids began to smart, and over his eyes there spread a dim, misty look.

Those great strong hands of Farmer Jim. He could see them now as they were held down to him the morning they lifted him up to Old Charlie's broad back. He remembered now how he had looked at his own little childish hands as they clasped them upon Farmer Jim's big strong ones. He could feel the warm, moist feel of them now, and unconsciously he leaned forward, then he came back to the present, his hand was reaching out, but it touched

only emptiness, and a sharp pain smote him, he was a man now, but the child soul still lived within him; and he longed with a great longing to be able to go and lay himself, just for a moment, upon that great loving heart and feel close clasped about him those great loving arms again; for, had not this man been to him such a father as his own father had not been?

His father. Again he was traversing the cool, wet wood path in the early morning. Again his throat began to throb, his chest to ache. The lights and shadows of that September day passed before him again.

And then the day of the festival —

He wished they would not trouble him. It was the porter, he was spreading a little table before him and putting things into his hand and urging him to eat; really he was not hungry, but then the porter had seemed so distressed, so he ate, and it did seem good, and after a while he was through, and there was a bright shining silver piece in the porter's hand, and he looked up and smiled, and then the porter gave that strange salute, and then he was alone again and busy with the past yet feeling the present.

Now it was good Mrs. Beaton, and she was telling him that wonderful story, and suddenly he felt himself crushed up close to her, and he wanted to laugh and he wanted to cry, because her arms felt so good around him; and she was just like — yes, just like a mother; you know he couldn't love anyone else just like he loved his mother; so the love he bore for Mary Beaton had a warm sunny spot in his heart all to itself.

So often she had scolded him and petted him at the same time, and he remembered that it always made him

laugh that laugh that seemed to come from away down somewhere, and ripple up all over him, and all who heard it had to laugh too.

Now he was back at the festival again. And there was a sharp pain at his heart and such a dreary ache around his throat as he looked toward Mr. Beaton's pew and saw his mother with the baby, Beatrice, clasped so close to her.

Had mother known, somehow, that the dear little baby sister was going away soon? And was that what had made her dear face look so gray and sad?

Mother was so different from other people. She did not talk much, but somehow, when you were where mother was, you felt so that you wanted to be just what you felt mother wanted you to be.

And he had not yet grown away from the old, boyish feeling that, when she was near, he must stretch out his hand and touch her; and so, often now when she started up the stair, he always rushed up and his strong arm would go out around her, and she would smile when he would give her that little hug before he let her go at the top of the stair.

Then that day he had coaxed her to go to the art gallery. Mother did not like to go out much, for she could not get used to the electric cars. But he had persuaded her and they went, and when they had boarded the car it started up quickly, but he was standing so close to her that he caught her against his breast with scarcely a jar, and he had taken hold of her and lifted her down to the seat so gently and firmly; and mother had turned her dear face up to his handsome, manly face, all lit up with a smile which seemed to penetrate to the very centre of his soul,

while all around seemed bathed in a beautiful, rosy light. But he had not noticed that the other passengers were watching, and seemed to bask in the radiant sunlight of that smile. Ah, blessed, thrice blessed are the mothers of men.

He leaned slightly forward and saw Mrs. Beaton holding little Margaret in her arm with the dear little chubby hand pressed so tightly against her lips; the little Margaret, why she was almost as tall as he now; she was his big sister now. He recalled the day she was eating an apple and had thrown the core at him from pure mischief.

He had called her to come and pick it up. She had answered that "she would not," then she ran, but he caught her, and picking her up in his strong arms had carried her back, helpless from laughter, and stooping down closed her hand upon the offending apple core, then carried both out to the kitchen and dropped the core in the stove, saying, as he placed her on her feet, "don't you tell me you won't, young lady." And mother had said, "When will you two ever grow up?"

He was hearing the great organ now. It was coming nearer, nearer, then a little stir; he looked up, the porter was saying, "Shall I make up your berth for you, sir?" He came back to the present. The berth was made up; the porter lingered and helped him to prepare for the night, with a sigh of relief he lay back as the porter drew the blankets up around him and fastened the draperies, leaving him sleeping soundly as the train sped on through the night and the dark.

In the light of the early morning the train drew into the station at Chicago.

After a few hours' delay, safely aboard the westward-bound train, he found himself speeding on his way.

The heavy lethargy had been dispelled; the awful mental weariness broken. With awakening interest he was looking out upon the flying scene as it passed rapidly by the narrow limits of the window, and finding something new at each step of the way, until, three days from the time he left New York, the train stopped at the little way station, which was little more than a flagging point, of Ball's Forks.

A long, dusty, weary ride in a rough farm wagon, and in the late afternoon they stopped at a large rambling ranch house, having reached the end of his journey. Here he found himself warmly welcomed by Mrs. Richards, the wife of the owner of the ranch, who explained that her husband had been compelled to be away from home, having been called out upon the range with his men looking after some cattle.

Being shown to the room he was to occupy, which was on the ground floor, with windows looking out upon the wide shady veranda, he began at once to get rid of the stains of travel.

Although inexpressibly wearied in body, his elastic spirit was beginning to assert itself; for, as he bent over the wash bowl to bathe his face and hands, he found great difficulty in following it from side to side, for it seemed as if mounted upon great heavy car wheels which bounded back and forth, striking the rail a sharp ringing blow at every swing.

At last, becoming thoroughly wearied of following it

back and forth, and trying to avoid dashing the water everywhere except upon his face, he grasped the sides of the wash stand firmly and held it in its place until he got it stopped, then he proceeded to finish his toilet.

After having finished, he started to leave the room, but remembering the wild gyrations of the wash stand, he turned to look if he might see where the legs had hit the rails, until he had grasped and held it and gotten it stopped, thereby keeping it from further injury. As he stood looking intently at it slowly the thought began to penetrate, that it was he, and not the wash stand, that had been performing those wild antics; and at the memory of it there rolled out over the quiet stillness a wave of rich laughter, and a few moments later, as he stepped out upon the veranda, the transformation of the man was to Mrs. Richards a genuine surprise.

The man who had gone in so shortly before had looked wearied unto death; now she was looking into those golden-grey eyes, out from which looked the unsullied soul of a child-man, with all the frank, smiling fearlessness of a boy, and she did not see the wasted face, the almost emaciated form, and the thin, bloodless hands.

With a feeling alternating between wonder and awe, she urged him into a seat, while she hurried away to her household duties, leaving him alone with the great spirit of the West, which was fast gathering about with the coming of the night.

A few days of rest in that wonderful vitalizing air, which poured its wine-like virtues into his wasted body with marvelously healing and strengthening effects, sufficed to revitalize his almost prostrate energies so that very soon

he forsook the cushioned chairs and settees of the veranda for the open adjoining the ranch buildings.

The magnificent stretches of the surrounding country were to him a revelation. With the exception of the first boyhood years of his life, the greater part had been spent almost wholly within the brick and mortar limits of the city.

Now as he was brought within the very heart of nature itself the old, wonderful, free spirit began to assert itself, and, as he stood thus once more face to face with God's own kingdom, the kingdom of the free, with his face turned toward the distant hills, over him would come a strange longing; a longing, almost as it were, to dissolve and become a throbbing, breathing, living part of it.

One day on one of his rambles he came upon a large inclosure, almost corral, confined within which was a band of half-wild young horses. His nostrils began to quiver and dilate as the smell of their sleek young bodies was borne to him on the light breeze. His hands began to itch and tingle just to touch, to fondle and caress them, and it was in the midst of these that Mr. Richards found him a few days later upon his return from the range.

"Hi, there?" he called. "Better get o' that! You're liable to get your head kicked off. Some of those youngsters are rather nasty."

From the midst of the horses that were crowded thickly around him Alfred Raymond turned at the sound of that call; then quietly scattering the contents of the sack he was carrying, he pushed them gently, yet fearlessly, aside and stepped toward his host with outstretched hand, to find

himself looking into a kindly shrewd face that resembled Mrs. Peter VanDyke's very closely.

"Van said you were pretty well used up and you do look some peaked, but old Arizona 'll set you up if anything will; most wonderful air in the world."

"It certainly is," was the smiling reply, "but don't tell me it will bring the dead back to life," and up surged that delicious wave of laughter, in which Mr. Richards joined heartily, as he said, "Cut your eye-teeth, I see. How is it," said he, "fond of horses?"

At the question Alfred turned to the band of young horses and gave a low whistle. Almost at once a fine young sorrel, with a coat like polished satin, and a beautiful flowing mane and tail of a lighter shade, that shone like silk in the sunlight, left the band and came toward him. Coming up to within about ten feet of the two men, she stopped and thrust out her beautiful head inquiringly, and nickered soft and low.

The soft silky forelock waved back and forth in the light breeze, half shading the beautiful brown eyes.

Mr. Richards watched the two closely.

Alfred put his hand in his pocket, then drew it out slowly, upon the palm lay a little white cube.

The sorrel walked up and began to nose for the sugar; he took her head in his hands, fondled her ears and face, stroked her mane, patted her gently, and then gave her the sugar; fondling and caressing her as he did so. Then turning to his questioner he said simply, "I love them; and I have always said, Mr. Richards, that, you show me a man's horses, and let me watch him handle them, and I will tell you what manner of man he is."

"By jove!" ejaculated Mr. Richards, "you are right. D' y'u ever ride?"

"A little," was the quiet reply, and as he held the sorrel for a moment his mind went back to his boyhood days with Farmer Jim, and old Charlie, and the sorrel colt; then he let her go back to the others.

"Well," said Mr. Richards, "there's plenty of saddles and riggin's around, and she's old enough to ride, so if you care to try why I won't object, and I guess you don't need any extra showing."

About a week later Mr. Richards, coming hurriedly toward the ranch house, encountered Alfred starting out for one of his daily "prowls" as he called them.

"Say, Raymond! I got to go out upon the range to-day, d' y'u want to ride along?"

"I certainly do," was the reply, then smilingly adding, "I was hoping for an invitation."

"Well, get the sorrel ready."

"The sorrel?"

"Yes, we'll ride easy and the run won't hurt her any."

Out upon the broad reaches they rode into the boundless expanse of distance.

Mr. Richards, riding with all the experience of an old plainsman, watched his companion closely.

Alfred and the sorrel moved as one. The harmony of movement between the two was perfect. A thing he noticed with pleasure and satisfaction was, that while Alfred never let the sorrel have her head, yet he never fretted her at all; when she shied once or twice at the sudden dash of a rabbit or bird, he spoke quietly and patted her, and very soon she ceased to notice any of the

little trifling things along the way. The confidence already established was remarkable, and when they reached the ranges she was apparently as fresh as when they started.

The experience to him was wonderful; never had he thought of looking upon such a sight as this; the seeming boundless expanse of grazing land, the thousands of cattle with the moving cowboys among them, was to him a revelation. Then the ride home over the prairie by starlight. Would he ever forget it? He did not think so. He was sure that he would not.

A few days later he rode back to the ranges alone, equipped for a stay, where he received a hearty welcome from Jimmy Doran, the man who had driven him over from the station; and then began a new life for him; a life of real earnest.

Up at break of day with the men, bearing his part of the duties. Out on the ranges, working with the boys with the cattle, proved the most perfect restorative, the greatest prescription that ever could be recommended.

After a few weeks, one looking at his splendid frame and handsome smiling face could scarcely believe that this could be the frail, emaciated man who had come to this place only so short a time before.

As his strength and vitality returned, the old painful longing awoke in his chest and throat, and became at last so insistent that one day, unable to resist the great desire longer, he sprang upon the sorrel and galloped away to a distant wooded hill.

There, while out looking for some straying cattle one day, he had found a peculiar formation of rock. Approaching from the side of the plain by an easy slope, he had

come upon a large projecting rock, or boulder, that faced a great opening, like an amphitheatre.

Throwing the bridle over the head of the horse, so that it would trail, and act as a loose tether at the same time, he left her to crop the grass while he made his way up to the top of the rock.

For a moment he stood, then he lifted his face as of old, and out over the great silence rolled a tone of incomparable beauty.

The weeks of rest and recreation had been of incalculable benefit. The light flexible air bore the tone out with wonderful elasticity.

Up and up went that superb voice; just trying, pausing, soaring, like a bird, trying its wings after some long enforced imprisonment might try, after having come to its freedom again.

Scales, skips, runs; incredible jumps; just one wild grand burst of melody from that golden throat.

After having worked for some time he stopped to regain his breath. Through the vast living silence he heard the plaintive whinny of Golden Betty, the sorrel. He turned in her direction, and standing motionless for a moment, while all about seemed to be waiting and listening, he lifted his handsome flushed face, his wonderful eyes glowing with an unquenchable inward fire, then beginning upon a low note he ascended through a most beautiful cadence, up, and finished upon an extremely high note, that ending like a thread of purest gold, seemed almost superhuman.

He made his way back to his horse, running and leaping like a beautiful wild thing from sheer joy. And why

should he not? Had not the wonderful golden-throated nightingale returned to him again, more wonderful, more beautiful than ever?

He felt he wanted to let all the world know and hear; he felt so full of joy. His mother; how she would rejoice with him; she had been so fearful. He wanted to tell her; it seemed he could scarcely wait to tell her; she must be the first to know.

He came out into the open where the sorrel welcomed him with a glad low whicker. He went to her and putting his arms around her exquisitely arched neck held her closely pressed to him for a moment; she, meanwhile, nosing in his pocket for sugar.

After having given her the coveted sweet he threw the bridle over his arm, and placing his hand upon her neck, he ran for about a mile; his splendid body bending forward like a young Indian, his weight thrown forward upon the ball of the foot, which again upbore him like a fine steel spring.

Day succeeded day, and the work of studying went steadily forward. He continued to live in the open among the cattle and horses, with the men, and the effects and benefit were wonderful. His fine temper and amiability endeared him to all with whom he came in contact. While his returning health and strength soon permitted him to cope successfully with the work of grazing, rounding and handling the cattle, the experience was to him of inestimable value.

It was the time of final rounding up.

They were resting after a successful battle royal with the half-wild cattle.

The wagon of supplies had been brought from the

ranch house, for the work of moving that great herd to the corral could go on but slowly.

The very horses they rode seemed keenly alive to the situation; one false move, one unnecessary start, was liable to stampede the whole herd, and then would have to begin the work all over, while much greater damage might be done.

It was late afternoon. Alfred was reading some letters from home, occasionally watching a big black steer that had given them considerable trouble. Golden Betty was grazing not far away. The great herd seemed comparatively quiet.

Two or three of the cowboys were endeavoring to digest a piece of news from the front page of a newspaper that had been put in with the supplies.

One of them called to him: "See here, Raymond. Listen to this."

"What is it?" he replied.

"What d' y'u think of this?" said Jimmie Doran reading. "'Shocking Accident! All Europe Aghast with Horror. His Imperial Highness, Raoul, Only Son of the Emperor Paul, and Heir to the Greatest Empire in the World, Instantly Killed, When the Horse He was Riding Went Over the Cliff at Rothaven.'"

"Say, Raymond," called one of the other men, "how'd you like to be a Crown Prince?"

Alfred stood and looked at the great drove of cattle, then turned his eyes out upon the plain, and as his gaze returned, he said, in a low intense voice, "Boys, I'd rather be the poorest cowboy on the plains of Arizona than to be the Emperor of the greatest dominion of the world. I

would not exchange my birthright as an American citizen for all the thrones of the old world."

"Hooray!" shouted Jimmie, as he threw his hat in the air. "That's the talk —"

"Look there!" said Alfred, breaking in upon his wild outburst. "After them, boys, quick!"

The black had been extremely hard to handle; he had resented fiercely being held in any kind of bondage, and at Jimmie's wild "Hooray" he had flung up his head and sent back a defiant bellow, then wheeled and went tearing madly off across the prairie.

Two or three others were beginning to drop out from the herd and were following in his wake; the great herd was beginning to move restlessly; unless something was done quickly all would be off.

Alfred darted back to the sorrel, shortened up the stirrup straps, drew the surcingle tighter, then, flinging himself into the saddle, he was off like the wind in the wake of the running steer.

Balancing himself upon the stirrups, and thrown well forward over the shoulders of the mare, his hands outstretched grasping the bit on either side of the head, his lithe muscular body swinging forward with every leap of the horse, impelling her ahead with a terrific velocity, he seemed fairly to fly over the ground.

The other men made a wild dash for their horses, and very shortly all were under headway, frantically bent on breaking up the impending stampede.

By this time the line of running cattle had increased considerably. As chaff upon a winnowing floor is blown by the current of air turned upon it, first a few shells, then

a few more, then a perfect tornado of flying husks, so this flight was growing.

Alfred and Golden Betty were rapidly overtaking the madly running steer. The black brute, his head low down, hearing the thundering hoofs of the flying sorrel, was straining every nerve to escape. Slowly they crept upon him. Now they were nearly abreast.

Alfred drew the swiftly running mare close up to the steer, which began to swerve to the left; the more he swung off, the more Alfred drew in on him until he succeeded in getting him to running in a wide circle.

As the leader began thus to veer to the left, the following flying cattle, urged by the other men, began to come to a like circle; the great herd by this time beginning to swing around in unison with the outer band of runaways.

Gradually swinging them in closer, the mounted men, their horses running at full speed, succeeded in encircling the entire herd.

Alfred, at a certain point, turned the sorrel full in upon the great black brute, and drove him full head into the herd, where he was soon completely surrounded, and thus effectually cut out from doing any further harm.

Slowly the great herd moved; quietly the men rode around; finally the cattle stopped, thoroughly beaten and willing to rest.

At last the rounding up was well on to completion. It was late September. Alfred was beginning preparations for his returning trip to the East, when he received a communication from Mr. VanDyke directing him to proceed at once across the continent to San Francisco, to dispatch some business for the company there.

The morning of his departure he rode the sorrel once more, accompanied by Mr. Richards and Jimmie Doran, to the station at Ball's Forks; his luggage having been sent on before with some of the other boys who wished to see him off.

As the train drew out from the little station, he lingered upon the platform, and the memory of that handsome, glowing face, those wonderful golden-gray eyes, and luminous smile, left an impression upon those strong men of the plains that never quite faded away.

The long journey was over. Back with the dearly loved mother and sister, he soon began to adjust himself to the old life. The trip across the continent had been to him a great education. Never had he realized the vast grandeur of his country before. Loving her passionately, having traversed it from the east to the west and back again, realizing that the great belt of civilization extended completely around the globe, that there was no "wild and wooley west," just one grand pathway of elevation, education, and enlightenment, and that this, his loved country, was the magnificent link that made the grand circle complete, caused him to thrill with a new and deeper love and patriotism. Therefore, it was with a new and deeper feeling of the responsibility that rested upon him as an American citizen, that he paused, as it were, to catch his second wind before starting anew upon the battle of life.

CHAPTER X

Steadily plowing their way through the blue Atlantic, the two great ironclads pursued their sturdy course.

Nothing of importance occurred upon the voyage, except that upon one a suite of rooms was being rapidly fitted up, and before the great vessel had reached the Banks, the rumor had spread through the entire company as to the errand upon which she was bent.

All were keenly excited, although strict orders had been issued forbidding any discussion upon their mission.

Upon swinging south from the Banks the two sister ships proceeded in a more southerly course than that taken by the regular liners, so that they ran outside the beaten path.

In a few days they steamed into the harbor of one of our middle southern cities and came to anchor.

Conjectures ran high as to what the errand of these two formidable ships might be that floated the ensign of a great foreign nation.

The Harbor Master swung alongside shortly after they had come to anchor, and was taken aboard, and upon being assured of the friendliness of their visit had departed, after granting the freedom of the harbor to the officers.

Shortly after the Harbor Master had departed, a launch put out from one of the vessels, carrying John of Ainhault and Col. Miron, who proceeded at once to Washington.

Arriving there they called upon their ambassador and

were closeted with him for some time; after explaining to him the nature of their errand, they desired him to arrange an interview for them with the President.

A few days later, all arrangements having been made, John of Ainhault received an invitation to dine with the President and his wife, privately, the ambassador having explained enough of his errand to secure such an informal meeting.

Traveling through the streets of Washington, viewing its magnificent buildings and noble avenues, had proven a veritable revelation to the young Archduke. Born and reared in one of the oldest and most exclusive courts in all Europe, hedged about with every Old World custom and spirit, he had come to believe the common impression of the New World. Had come to believe that it was little better than an overgrown upstart. But upon coming face to face with that much maligned and misrepresented country, had taught him as much, or more in twenty-four hours, than he could have learned otherwise in as many years.

Coming in such close contact with the President and his beautiful but fragile wife, he was astonished at the extreme high degree of refinement and education, and the wonderful religious spirit that permeated the man's whole being. Indeed, he was obliged to acknowledge that, never in all his life had he ever been in the presence of such true and gentle dignity as that which clothed this man as with a mantle.

The President and his good lady listened attentively to his tale, expressing their sincere sympathy, and desiring him to say in what way they could best assist him in his search.

His reply was, that all he could ask, in fact the only request he had to make, was, that he be allowed to prosecute his search unhindered, and to that end had come to His Excellency to make such a request. Whereupon he was assured by the President that his request was granted even before it was made, urging that he, the President, would esteem it a privilege to be allowed to assist in whatever way he could.

The meal ended, the short visit was brought to a close, and as John of Ainhault left the executive mansion it was with the feeling that never had he spent a more delightful evening.

And now the real search began. From Washington they proceeded to Westport, the home of John and Margaret Raymond. The Archduke Walther experienced but little trouble in locating the house, but as Margaret had gone from that place more than twenty-five years before, he could learn but little of her. At last, through much questioning, they learned that she had gone about that time to Bentberg, after marrying a man by the name of John Raymond, who was now living nearby, so to him they went and from him they learned much about her life and the life of the boy.

At the suggestion of Col. Miron, they went to Bentberg and there, finding Jim and Mary Beaton, secured a few more links in the chain. From Mary Beaton they drew the story of the night when Alfred and his mother, with the two little ones, disappeared; at the same time listening to her conjectures of the affair so far as she supposed Jerry Bond was concerned.

Like a hound on the scent, Col. Miron brought all his

faculties into play; the next move was to locate Jerry Bond, which he finally succeeded in doing, and by careful questioning, got the remainder of the story up to the time he had put them on the train for New York at Bart-Haven. There the trail seemed to end. All trace of them was lost, nor could they again find it.

CHAPTER XI

Maestro Burgmuller strode angrily along the street, cursing the eccentricities of people in general and of great singers in particular.

The reason for his present perturbation was that he had just come from a stormy interview with Mdlle. Corina DelMere, who had flatly refused to go on the boards again with Schelmendauer, the great tenor.

Burgmuller had to acknowledge that Schelmendauer was drunk, which had caused all the trouble, but then that had not interfered with his singing; of course the dear public had noticed that he had not acted as well, and the press had put it down to a sudden indisposition. But DelMere would listen to no excuse or palliation; her decree was final. And the bill that night was "Faust;" and DelMere had the exclusive right to appear in that opera; but where, where was he to find a Faust?

Did she think they could be picked up at any street corner?

Of course DelMere could dictate; was she not the idol of the public, and would not the public uphold her?

What was he to do? Faust was on for that night and here it was eleven o'clock in the morning, and no Faust in sight.

He would call up the theatre and cancel the engagement; that's what he would do.

"Hello, Central! give me 1659! Yes, 1659! Hello! Hello! Is this 1-6-5-9? It is? The Grand Opera House?

Hu? Well, this is Burgmuller. What? You knew it? well, why didn't you say so at first and not keep me waiting here all this time? Say! Listen! How's the sale of tickets for to-night? Ha! What? Every seat sold? Only standing room left?

Slam went the receiver on the hook as Mr. Burgmuller rushed out into the street almost tearing his hair as he went.

"—— ——— ——— that piano anyway, 'f I had my way I'd pitch every —— ——— p-i-a-n-o——"

Burgmuller turned and grasped the fence that enclosed a yard near by and stared at the small, modest house before him with an almost idiotic stare.

"Then shall the Righteous shine,"

A voice of incredible beauty floated out over the quiet of this little street.

On it went, through the great solo, a voice of more than mortal power and sweetness.

Great drops of perspiration stood out all over the face of the great Maestro.

As the last note died away he tore open the gate and, rushing up the walk to the door, rang the bell furiously.

In a moment a hurried step was heard within and the door was quickly opened.

Burgmuller started forward, the words tumbling upward in one confused jumble, then catching sight of the handsome face, and grand gray eyes of Alfred Raymond bent wonderingly upon him, the power of speech failed him entirely.

He could only stand and stare.

Where had he seen that face before?

"Did you wish to see anyone?"

His mind began to adjust itself gradually.

What had he come for? Oh, yes; now he remembered. He had heard someone singing. A drowning man will catch at a straw, and he was only human.

Alfred waited.

"I heard you singing?"

It was a question in every word.

"Yes," was the calm reply. "Will you not come in?"

He found himself ushered into a dainty music room.

He still felt dazed; the strain had been very great.

"Let me bring you a glass of water."

He felt better. He was trying to arrange his thoughts.

"I heard you. I want some one to sing Faust to-night. Will you do it?"

Even while he asked it he knew that it was the most absurd thing that could be imagined; but the man was in desperate straits.

"Why, I am not sure that I can."

"Do you not know the music?"

"Yes," said Alfred slowly, "but you surprise me very much. I had not thought of such a thing, at least, not yet."

Then Burgmuller broke loose, all the story came out and in the end Alfred, won over, all arrangements were completed. Burgmuller left the house feeling as though a miracle had been performed. Indeed he shook himself several times to assure himself that it had not all been a hideous nightmare which had ended in a very satisfying and comfortable dream.

The great auditorium of the grand opera house was filling rapidly, the half-subdued light showed one of the most brilliant gatherings of the season. Trimly dressed ushers were moving quickly up and down the aisles; the click of the falling seats and the rustle of silken garments gave out a peculiarly pleasant and comfortable sound.

It was a gala night. Two of the world's greatest singers were going to appear together in Gounod's beautiful opera of Faust. The occupants of the boxes were beginning to arrive, and already considerable calling was being done; and for a short time the scene began to take on almost a social appearance.

Those on the floor of the house were so busy watching the new arrivals that no one had thought of looking at a programme.

Outside a long line of people were waiting for the opportunity of getting even standing room. Expectations were running high. Someone scanned a programme. Yes, there was DelMere's name; but what was this? Where was Schelmendauer? Surely he had been promised for to-night.

Perhaps there was another part; sometimes the programme was divided.

No, his name did not appear. There was DelMere as Marguerite, and down here at the end was, Faust, Alfred Raymond.

What was this? Burgmuller had promised DelMere and Schelmendauer. The papers had been full of it for a week, and now, at the last minute, a name was substituted that they had not even heard.

Was Burgmuller descending to the common tricks of trade? If so, he would feel the weight of their displeasure.

Already expressions of dissatisfaction were being heard from different parts of the house. Two or three went to the box office and demanded the return of their money. Others threatened. Just then Mrs. Peter VanDyke entered her box with her husband. Attention was diverted. Was she not the great social leader? And the heaviest subscriber for the season? They would wait and see how she accepted the change.

Was she not a social arbiter? though quiet, and unostentatious, yet, there were few there who did not know that she was the real "power behind the throne."

So they would be governed by her movements in the matter.

All unconscious that she was being covertly watched, she took her seat and slowly scanned the house, bowing to some two or three acquaintances near.

"Have you seen your programme, Myra?" said Mr. VanDyke, who had been watching the audience while the audience had been watching her.

"No," was the reply. "Why do you ask?"

"There has been a change made in the programme, and the people are looking to see whether or not you approve."

"A change!" said she. "Not DelMere?"

"No; Schelmendauer."

"Schelmendauer!"

"Yes; it seems that he was so disgustingly drunk the last time he appeared with DelMere, that she has positively refused to go on with him again."

"Quite right," said she. "DelMere is, I consider, a woman of fine principles; and I heartily approve every such decision; but who, pray tell, has been substituted?"

"Would you not better read your programme? The people are watching closely; evidently they resent the change and are looking to you to decide for them."

"No, I will not look now, but you may tell me, if you will."

"Do not be surprised, for it is someone of whom you are as ignorant as myself. At least in a musical way."

She looked up earnestly and inquiringly into her husband's face, while he was smiling down at her as if they were pursuing only an ordinarily pleasant conversation.

Many were observing them closely. Evidently things were not as bad as they had thought; they would still wait a little.

"It is Alfred Raymond," said Mr. VanDyke.

"Alfred Raymond," said she almost vaguely.

"Yes," said he. "Do you not remember the man from my office whom we sent out to Arizona to Henry's?"

Mrs. VanDyke saw again a little crouching form, a white, drawn face, and a man's strong arm crushing the child in close, warm embrace, and her eyes grew misty with tenderness.

"Alfred Raymond," said she musingly. "Why, did you know that he could sing?"

"Never dreamed of such a thing. Well, he's in a mighty ticklish place now. What are you going to do about it?"

"What I am going to do about it!" said she. "Why do you say that; what have I to do with it?"

“Why, can’t you see the position that he is in? That you are in? Schelmendauer is one of the greatest tenors in the world to-day, considered by some to be the greatest. The people have come to hear him with DelMere; but instead of finding his name on the programme, they find the name of Alfred Raymond; a name, I’ll wager, they have never even heard; naturally they are more or less indignant, and are watching for the first excuse, no matter how slight, to show their resentment. Now it is well known that it is largely due to you that they are enjoying the present season of opera. If you remain passive, they will infer that you were aware of the change, and approve of it. If, on the contrary, you should decide not to countenance any such a change, and should send for Burgmuller, and demand an explanation, or leave the house, it would not be five minutes before the box office would be besieged, and the house emptied.”

“If the man can sing, all might be well; but, if on the other hand, he should fail, it would, to say the least, look strange.”

Mrs. Peter VanDyke looked out over the sea of eager, upturned faces without seeing them. What she did see was the face of a child wet with the tears of a man, and, looking up into the face of her husband, she said in a low voice, so low that he had to bend down to hear, “I will stay.”

Just at that moment a large party entered one of the boxes not far away, and at the same time the men of the orchestra began to take their places and, between the two diversions, the audience forgot all else; when they did remember they determined to show that they did not approve of the change; the new singer should receive a cool recep-

tion from them; they would show Burgmuller that he must not think that they could be cajoled into an easy acquiescence.

The overture was ending; the curtain was rising upon the last note as a strong, pure tone floated out over the waiting throng.

Faust was in his laboratory, regretting his age and past life. But what was the matter? The great orchestra was playing with so much power as to almost drown the singer's voice. Surely that was a strange proceeding, the people looked to each other with questioning glances. Faust was singing, but the great orchestra was playing the part; he was acting, and every gesture was perfect, the picture was complete.

Mrs. VanDyke looked at her husband and said, "What does it mean? They are playing the man's part for him. Why do they do that?"

To which he replied, "Why, don't you understand? There evidently has been no rehearsal and the conductor has been instructed to carry him through at all hazards; for my part I would prefer that they give the man at least a fighting chance, for I half believe he'd get away with it."

"Don't talk slang, said she. "At least, not here."

"Just a business remark," said he, smiling.

"Can nothing be done about it?" said she.

"Better let well enough alone," remarked he, shrewdly.

The transformation had taken place, but a second remarkable circumstance was apparent. Evidently something was wrong with the lights, for wherever Faust moved, he remained in a shadow sufficiently dim, that from their box

and the greater part of the house his features could not be clearly seen.

In the jewel song, DelMere surpassed herself; never had she sung so well; the great audience went wild, and called her back again and again. In the King of Thule she had made them cry, but they forgave her that. Schelmendauer was forgotten. Raymond they ignored; evidently he was only filling in; but DelMere, DelMere more than satisfied, and they recalled and recalled, and seemed they would not be satisfied.

In her dressing room, before the garden scene, DelMere sent for Burgmuller; he began to shower her with praise. Had she not helped to save the day? But she cut him short. "What did Mademoiselle want, was he not allowing everything in her behalf? What more could he do? What more could she ask?"

She "wanted to know why the orchestra was treating Alfred Raymond in that brutal manner? What did they mean by storming everything he did as if they were nothing better than a common brass band."

At that Burgmuller winced, for he prided himself upon his orchestra, and nothing hurt him so much as to be compared to anything of that kind.

Surely Mademoiselle knew that Raymond was only an amateur and there was no telling when he might fail. He was only ——

"Fiddlesticks!" said she. "Alfred Raymond was only an amateur, she would admit, but she had trained him herself, and she would vouch for anything he would do."

"Mademoiselle had trained him?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle had trained him," said she mimic-

ing his astonishment; "and now I want you to play for him just as you play for me. I'll not stand for any more of this nonsense. At least give the man a show."

"Very well; it should be as Mademoiselle said, but Mademoiselle must remember that the dear public would blame him and not her if anything went wrong."

She cut him short by telling him that she had to "dress for the next scene," that is, if he would "allow her the use of her dressing room by removing himself from it."

Faust was standing in the garden before the house of Marguarite.

The great orchestra, subdued now to an ineffable tenderness, was giving out the prelude to the great solo, "Oh, Dwelling Pure and Holy."

The vast audience, thrilled by the exquisite strains, and roused by the striking change, were waiting with an almost fearful expectancy.

Surely this was a night of surprises; first the loud, overwhelming work of the orchestra, now the very extreme. Never had they played with such exquisite delicacy. What did it portend? This extreme change would demand more than mortal powers to sustain.

Up in the VanDyke box Mr. VanDyke was leaning forward with an anxiety he could not quite conceal.

Mrs. VanDyke held her fan before her face as if to shut out the glare of the light from the stage.

Alfred Raymond stood yet in a dim shadow.

He heard the beautiful melody and its accompanying harmonies coming nearer and nearer. He had forgotten the great theatre, the vast throng, the orchestra. He saw

the little house of his childhood's home. He had forgotten all of his sorrows. He saw only his mother in the doorway.

The music was coming nearer and nearer, then, out, over that silent, expectant, waiting crowd there floated a voice so marvellously beautiful that the blood in their veins seemed turned to water.

They were soundless, motionless, almost, it seemed, lifeless. Alfred Raymond was singing now and the great orchestra were following, entirely subdued, completely mastered.

He scarcely heard them; he had entirely forgotten them. He was thinking only of his mother; out there, somewhere in the gloom, she was sitting with his beautiful sister, and he was singing to her, for her.

The climax was coming. The test that had broken many a man. Many began to grow apprehensive. What if he should not be able to stand that test? Now they began to fear that he might fail. Now they were hoping, praying almost, that he would not.

Just at that moment that glorious voice paused; then, like an eagle in its flight, it soared up that magnificent run to the high C, and out over the great orchestra it rang like a golden trumpet, vibrant, jubilant, triumphant.

Just at that moment the shadow that had obscured him suddenly broke, and the light burst out in full radiance; the effect was startling. The wonderful beauty of the man was now for the first time fully shown. His grand, golden-gray eyes flashing like great jewels, while the vast multitude sat as if stunned by the glorious beauty of his voice.

Suddenly there broke out over that wonderful silence a sharp exclamation.

Mr. VanDyke turned to look, and saw that from the box near his, which was occupied by the party of strangers, one man was leaning far out with outstretched hands, pointing to the singer; he heard a sharp exclamation, and then the words, "There he is now!"

In the gloom of the great auditorium the audience were only able to catch a faint blurred outline of the action, but they heard the ejaculation; some misunderstood; instantly there was confusion. A sharp voice rang out, "Put him out!" There were other ejaculations, hisses, cries of "Shame! shame! Put him out! Throw him out!" The confusion grew.

Upon the brilliantly lighted stage Alfred stood as if turned to stone. His handsome, glowing face became ghastly white; his eyes took on a dazed look of horror. What had happened? What had he done wrong? Had he failed after all? Slowly the curtain descended.

He stood dazed, stupefied, rooted to the spot. The noise outside was growing louder.

Suddenly, out over the almost hysterical throng rang a woman's voice. Mrs. VanDyke had suddenly awakened to the full meaning of the critical situation. "Encore! Encore!" she cried. Another joined, then a third, a man's voice answered; then, down, like a peal of thunder rolled a tremendous round of applause. Cries of "Raymond! Raymond!" Encore! Encore!"

Alfred had not moved. Corina DelMere rushed up to him and shook him. "Come," said she, "come, do you not hear? They want you."

Grasping his hand, she dragged him to the front of the platform. With her own hands she flung the great curtain back and drew him out before the footlights. The applause was deafening. Men shouted themselves hoarse. Women stood upon their seats and waved to him. In the midst of the excitement some one flung a great bouquet of beautiful roses; he caught them against his chest, held them for a moment, and then, with a smile and bow, with all the simple grace of a child, he laid them in the arms of Corina DelMere. The tumult was deafening.

Alfred Raymond had come into his own.

At last they let him go and the great music drama went on. In the prison scene he was incomparable; DelMere out-did herself.

In the duet, where the melody changes to a higher range, each time the two voices were in the most perfect accord; the effect was indescribable.

It was impossible to go on, and the great work ended there, and the two were given an ovation, the equal to which has never been witnessed.

After the confusion had abated, Burgmuller came to him and asked to be allowed to present a party who wished to meet him. Thoroughly wearied, Alfred begged to be excused, saying that he would see them at his home in the morning.

Finding his mother and sister, he made his way from the theatre.

Upon reaching his home, he said, as he kissed his mother good-night, "Mother, it was all for you, and all I am you have made me."

CHAPTER XII

In the cool of the early morning a horse and its rider were standing upon the bridle path, far up in the interior of Central Park, near an intersecting footpath, and so closely were they drawn up to the thick foliage, that one passing hurriedly along the footpath would scarcely notice them.

The horse, a beautiful brown, stood absolutely motionless and some in the shadow so that a second look was necessary to make it well out.

Now the eyes catch the glitter of trappings, and looking closer, one discovers that its harness bears the stamp of the mounted police. For the first time the eye rests upon the rider, and, looking closer,— was it, could it be? Yes, it was our old friend, Danny O’Gorman.

Immaculate as usual, from the tip of his natty cap to the toe of his polished boot. His closefitting brown suit showed off his fine figure to the best advantage; the silver trimmings were polished to the finest point of perfection. The loose-fitting trousers ended in neatly-fitting leather leggings that were absolutely spotless. His badge of rank blazed with an almost menacing light.

One trimly gauntleted hand held the soft rein firmly, while with the other he straightened out a few refractory locks of the black mane. Above all, his fine Irish face and blue eyes looked out upon the world with a very complaisant look.

Altogether Officer Danny and his handsome bay presented a picture good to look upon.

For some time they remained standing in the seclusion almost motionless.

Once or twice he bent down and peered out across the meadow through the foliage as if expecting someone.

The intersecting footpath could be seen stretching away to the left for some distance, but from the right it approached with a sharp turn and incline, so that one coming from that direction would come upon the horseman suddenly, nor have any means of evasion.

Now, through the quiet of the early morning, with the noise of the great city sounding but dimly in the distance, he could hear someone approaching from the right, running rapidly.

He turned to listen.

The sound of running feet was becoming more distinct.

What could this be? He had heard a few rumors of marauders; was this someone of that band? Perhaps some act of vandalism had been disturbed, and the members had scattered; well, let them come on, he was ready.

Perhaps it was something more serious. His mouth set in a rigid line as he grasped the reins of his horse more firmly and drew them up.

The flying feet were very near.

Now he caught a glimpse of a lithe, muscular body, bent forward and running like an Indian, rushing up the incline with an almost incredible speed.

The head bent forward and bared was covered with a mass of waving, golden-brown hair, but the face was obscured.

As the runner dashed around the turn and started to cross the bridle path, the bay shot forward like an arrow and blocked the passage.

"Halt!" rang out sharp and clear.

The runner flung himself backward with all his strength and barely avoided crashing into the horse with full force; indeed, had he not flung out his hands he would have done so.

The horse gave a start and swerved a little as the outstretched hands came against his smooth, satiny coat.

"What the ——" began Officer Danny, then, "Boy Star! Boy Star!"

"Officer Danny!"

Officer Danny was standing on the ground. How he got off his horse he did not know. For a moment it looked as if he was tumbling, only there was no part of him that was coming first. He was just naturally there all at once.

The recognition was mutual.

For a moment the Irish blue eyes of the Officer looked into the eyes of his dearly-loved Boy Star, then he reached out and crushed him to him in a fierce, passionate embrace. "Boy Star, Boy Star," he crooned, all the fierce affection of his race surging up over him, "An' where have ye been all the while; och, boy! How I've missed ye!"

Then he gave him a passionate shake as he pushed him off to arms' length, and looked long and earnestly into the face he had longed so for, through the passing years.

"Office Danny, my friend, my friend." And Alfred Raymond's handsome face and eyes grew pathetic with the look of a child as he went on to explain his long silence after his sudden disappearance.

Officer Danny looked into that glowing face, then stepped back, and involuntarily he saluted again with that strange salute.

He could not understand the strange feeling that possessed him, and when he remembered the fierce, passionate embrace he shivered, and his face grew slightly pale.

Now he had remounted his horse. Alfred had reminded him that the duties of his position required that he remain in the saddle while discharging them, and at the suggestion, he could not repress the feeling that he had been spoken to by a superior officer nor could he shake this off.

What a meeting that was; eager questions and answers; they had so much to say, so many recollections of the old days; and did Boy Star remember the first day that he met him? "Shure, all the heart of him had been as water then, and the days that had followed and the love he bore for his Boy Star; shure, it was passing the love for woman ——." And then he stopped, and a flush came upon his handsome face as he remembered why he had been waiting so long at that place that morning.

His cheek burned as he felt the little note that lay hidden in an inner pocket.

A beautiful woman, a neglected wife; humiliated.

He often saw her riding in the park. A trivial accident, it had broken the ice. A word of sympathy. The world knew her wrongs.

The little note asked for the meeting; he knew he was doing wrong, but then she was a beautiful woman and rich, and he was flattered. He had refused to listen to cold reason, even when the little dovelike, brown-eyed wife had

come and whispered in his ear, "I'm afraid, Danny, oh, I'm afraid." A crisis, the trial of her love and life were coming. He had put it all away from him. And now, somehow, this boy-man made him feel so uncomfortable. He tried to change his thoughts. To get away from them. "Shure, had his Boy Star read the papers?"

"Read the papers? Why?" said Alfred.

"Faith, then he hadn't or he would have seen it. There shure was one happy man in the great city that morning, for everyone was talking of him, and all the papers were praising him. My! My! But it must be an illigant thing to be such a grand singer. And hadn't the people almost smothered him with flowers, and hadn't the ladies, bless their swate hearts, fairly delooged him with their jools?"

"Officer Danny, what are you talking about," said Alfred at length, when he could interrupt the avalanche of words.

"What was he talkin' about? Why, about the opery, and that man Alfred Raymond, shure! And hadn't the papers been full of the talk of him, and sayin' that he had sung loike an angel? Shure, an' wuldn't he loike to hear him?"

Alfred was standing close to the horse, his right arm up around the arched neck, with the glossy coat pressed close against his richly glowing cheek. Upon hearing his own name, the truth dawned upon him like a flash that Officer Danny had never heard his name, consequently he had not associated his Boy Star with the much-talked-of Alfred Raymond.

Upon hearing the wish expressed by the officer, he

looked up with a merry twinkle in his eye, which again showed that little glint of green.

"So you would like to hear Alfred Raymond sing," said he.

"I shure would," was the earnest reply.

Meanwhile the two men had been so intent upon their own meeting that they had not noticed a horse and rider approaching from across the great meadow. The softly-yielding turf had deadened the foot-falls of the horse, and now horse and rider were standing motionless not far away, hidden by the thickly leaved copse, yet in easy hearing distance.

The fair rider had recognized the voice of the officer, but the other was a stranger to her, and so had deemed it wise to remain unseen.

When the conversation had turned upon the previous night and the opera, she had become more than interested, for she had been present, and, in fact, it was she who, carried away by the power of that glorious voice and the personal beauty of the man, had flung the roses at him.

Alfred was looking up into the face of the friend of his boyhood days with a smile of rare tenderness, and Officer Danny closed his eyes, almost overpowered by the pure love that shone out from that look.

The smile deepened, the eyelids dropped, half veiling those wonderful eyes that seemed fairly to dazzle him.

The beautifully rounded chin was half raised, the full lips parted, showing the edges of his snow-white teeth; and then out over the soft, exquisite air of the morning there floated a voice of such liquid tenderness, that the

listener upon the other side of the little leafy wood caught her breath with a fierce sob.

Officer Danny's eyes opened wide with astonishment at that sound and he could only stare, almost stupidly, at the handsome, animated face before him; then everything faded from about him. He saw the mighty Jephtha returning from battle, victorious, repeating, in the exuberance of his joy, the vow he had vowed, that "If the Lord would make him victorious," he "would sacrifice the first thing he saw when he returned, coming from his house."

He saw the horror upon the victorious leader's face, the agony, the despair; for, standing before him in all her soft womanly beauty was his own daughter.

He saw all the struggle, heard all the impassioned plea wherewith he tried to find some avenue of escape; but there was none.

The wonderful voice ceased; there was a moment's pause. The woman beyond the hedge was weeping softly, her heart broken.

Then the scene changed. Officer Danny was standing in a dim religious light; he saw a bier, and resting upon it a beautiful, marble-like figure, clad in mystic, snow-white shrouds. Kneeling close beside was the broken-hearted father. Through the dim silence stole this prayer,

"Waft Her, Angels, through the Skies."

The great leader had conquered, even in death.

As the last note of that superb voice died away, there remained a deathly silence. A moment, then the officer came back to life, so to speak. 'Twas a little Irish song now and Alfred Raymond was looking up at him with all

the sweet, loyal tenderness of a child, as the notes rippled out like purest gold.

“Oh, she is not like the rose,
That proud in beauty grows,
And boasteth that she's so wondrous fair.
But she's like the violet blue,
Ever modest, ever true,
And wasteth her sweetness on the still night air.
Oh, she's gentle, loving, mild,
She's as artless as a child,
With her golden tresses floating down;
Oh, I love thee, only thee,
My Colleen Gal, Machree,
My true love, my snowy-breasted pearl.”

Officer Danny saw the little brown-haired wife, and heard again the whispered words, “Oh, Danny, I'm afraid! Oh, I'm afraid!” But the voice was going on.

“Such was she, but, oh, a change,
So wondrous and so strange,
. . . o'er my true love came.
Paler still her pale cheek grew,
And her eyes of azure hue,
Seemed lighted with a fatal wasting flame.”

An icy hand clutched his heart and chilled him through all his being.

“I'm alone, alone, alone,
So wearily I moan,
For my lost love, my snowy-breasted pearl.”

The woman reined her horse away across the soft, yielding turf, weeping bitterly. The fair citadel of her womanhood had been besieged. An angelic voice had come

and, like a messenger from the celestial regions, had shown her the black abyss at her feet; God sent her sons and daughters; and in her darkest hour, her salvation was wrought.

"Boy Star! Boy Star!" exclaimed Officer Danny, "you are ——"

"Alfred Raymond." Was the reply.

Just then a clock chimed the half hour.

"What was that?" said Alfred, "half-past nine?"

The other nodded.

"I have an engagement at ten," he continued, "I was taking a run just for exercise. I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll race you. I'll go across the meadow, you keep to the bridle path and see who reaches the gate first."

"Done," said the other.

Like an arrow shot from a bow, that exquisite body sped away, while the splendid horse tore at full speed down the bridle path.

A few minutes later they met at the gate, the race declared a draw.

From the platform of the car Alfred looked back. Officer Danny saluted. The salute was returned. The car sped away.

At a few minutes after ten, his sister, who was watching for him, let him in at the door, telling him as she did so, that a party of gentlemen were waiting for him in the parlor.

In his old, boyish fashion, he put his arm around her, and moved forward to the stair. She left him there, saying that she must go to the rear of the house upon some errand for her mother.

Margaret Raymond, or Madge, as Alfred sometimes

called her, had grown into a very beautiful girl; a trifle taller than her mother, who was of medium height.

Her face, oval in shape, was of exquisite fairness; her eyes, large and of a deep velvety blue; her hair, a pure pale yellow, was like spun silk, and when let down, fell far below the knee, now plainly parted and woven in two braids, was wound around her finely shaped head like a coronal.

In character she seemed possessed of all the nobler qualities of her forbears, with none of the shortcomings of her father, which the splendid character and example of her mother had developed to the fullest.

Though finely educated by the best teachers and schools, she still remained very like the mother she so much resembled; simple and unaffected. In fact the quiet steadfastness and reliability of her Quaker parentage were strongly developed.

As she passed on, Alfred went up the stairs, two steps at a time, and a few minutes later his mother heard him whistling and splashing in his bath like a schoolboy, and smiled as she mused upon that grand young life with all of its promises and possibilities.

A short while after she heard his light, elastic step as he descended the stair, and soon he passed out of hearing.

Alfred Raymond, as he stepped into the doorway of the parlor in his home that morning, presented a picture of manly beauty, seldom if ever equalled, certainly never surpassed, as he stood between the dark hangings, which threw out the fair picture he presented with most startling distinctness.

In height he was a little under six foot tall, with a fine

breadth of shoulders, and full chest; the form tapering away in splendid lines to a pair of perfectly shaped, slender feet, gave a considerable impression of slenderness to the whole body, which, being now fully developed by his recent experience in the West, was as near absolute perfection as it were possible to be.

The splendid, proudly poised head was fitly crowned with a mass of wavy, gold-brown hair; the skin of the face, without spot or blemish, was tinted a soft golden glow of the tan he had brought back from the plains, through which the rich, red blood shone with rare coloring; while the grand, golden-gray eyes flashed and glowed like great jeweled orbs.

Clad in a neat, well-fitting suit of light, soft gray, his linen immaculately white, with a soft white tie, he came upon the waiting party with startling effect.

As he stepped into the room he met a goodly party of men; every one of whom had risen to his feet and now stood in an almost respectful attitude.

There was a sharp exclamation, and he saw that the entire party were watching him with a sharp piercing look.

He looked past them and saw Burgmuller standing alone, a little in the rear, and at one side.

"Ah, good morning, Herr. Burgmuller," said he, as he started forward with outstretched hand to greet him. "I must apologize for having kept you waiting," then he stopped, a look of wonder upon his face. Burgmuller was standing before him, bowing most deeply and respectfully, but not once offering to touch the outstretched hand.

Alfred turned his gaze wonderingly, questioningly upon the rest of the party.

"These gentlemen, Burgmuller, they are friends of yours; you will present me."

There seemed to be a strangeness about Burgmuller that did not well accord with the former visit of the great maestro.

"Yes, your —"

"Burgmuller!" a voice spoke up sharply.

Alfred looked toward the speaker; Burgmuller seemed covered with confusion, as he turned and seemed about to reply, but catching a look from the speaker he remained silent.

"You may present us, Burgmuller."

"Yes, your —" Burgmuller stopped in the same confusion he hesitated, "this is Mr. John Ahrnut." He stumbled hesitatingly over the name.

fusion, then he continued, "This, your —, this, sir, is —,"

Alfred turned toward the man indicated with hand held out. Again he was met with that same deferential bow. Still his hand remained untouched.

He was now aware of some strongly suppressed undercurrent and wondered whither it all tended.

When Burgmuller presented the next man he made no motion except a slight inclination of the head, and so on through the entire party.

As the last man stepped forward, Alfred found himself looking into a hard grizzled face from out of which shone a pair of piercing dark eyes.

For a moment the dark eyes of the older military looking man, who answered to the name of Col. Miron, looked unfalteringly into his own, then the lids were

lowered, and the same courtly deferential bow, which was almost an obeisance.

That all were under some restraint he was keenly aware, and it was with growing wonder that he bade the party to be seated.

For a moment there was an awkward pause, then the man who was called John Ahrnut said, with evident embarrassment, "After you, sir."

Now Alfred had been trained along some very strict lines, and among them was the rule that he should not be seated in his own house until every stranger present had been made comfortable; also that every person, though a stranger, within his doors was his guest, and consequently his charge, so that with those few words spoken to him in a low deferential tone the warm blood for a moment flushed his face a deeper glow.

Again ensued a little pause.

"Gentlemen," said he calmly, "this is my house; will you not be seated?"

The words, quiet, simple, dignified, seemed as if about to create a panic. Then Col. Miron spoke brusquely, "Sir, we are not allowed to sit in your presence."

Alfred looked at the party, blank astonishment expressed in every feature of his face.

"Cannot sit in my presence!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean? Gentlemen," and his voice rang out sharp, clear and stern, "were I in your homes I would expect to remember all that such a position would require of me, and would govern my movements accordingly, as befits a man and a gentleman."

Like a blade of steel those words cut the air, which seemed tingling with some intense magnetic undercurrent.

Involuntarily Alfred had stiffened, and now seemed to be rigid in every part; he suddenly found himself keenly upon the alert and defensive.

Consternation seemed to seize him. The tense feeling grew.

Suddenly Alfred felt himself pitted alone against the whole party. What did he expect? He did not know. He only found himself watching, intensely alert.

"Sir," said the man John Ahrnut, who seemed to be the spokesman and leader of the party, "I know that our attitude must appear most strange to you, and I pray you be patient with us, for we have a very peculiar and difficult errand to perform." His voice was low and deferential. "Will you pardon me, if I seem to be assuming a prerogative, and ask you if you will not be seated? What I have to say may be long."

Alfred waved the request aside. "Say on, he said, "I will listen."

A death-like silence settled over the entire party as John Ahrnut began his narration.

His voice was low, almost pleading, yet every word, every tone was clearly distinct.

"You may have heard or read a few weeks ago of the shocking accident that destroyed the life of the Crown Prince Raoul, son of the Emperor Paul?"

Alfred bowed, without speaking.

"But the startling and almost seemingly improbable part of the tale is that it was not the Crown Prince who was killed after all."

“Not the Crown Prince!” echoed Alfred.

“No,” resumed the other. “By a peculiar accident the Emperor learned that the man who was killed was not his son.”

“Not his son!” Alfred found himself repeating the man’s words and interested in spite of himself. “But, continued he, “at first you say it was the Crown Prince who was killed, then you deny it; your words are very strange. Did not the Emperor know his own son?”

“As I said,” answered John Ahrnut, “it was by accident alone that the Emperor learned that the dead man was not his son as he had believed. Col. Miron here was present, attending upon my uncle—Ah!” He checked himself suddenly.

“You!” said Alfred sharply, “are—”

“John of Ainhault,” was the low reply.

“And Prince of Polen,” finished Alfred.

The other bowed, then resumed, “Col. Miron was in attendance upon my uncle, the Emperor, when he, the Emperor, heard his brother, the Archduke Walther, bewail his failure, after having, years before, substituted his son for the son of the Emperor, thereby determining to place his son upon the throne; and having made the change successfully, carried the rightful heir away to a life of obscurity. That his plans would have ultimately succeeded, had not the tragic death of the supposed Crown Prince frustrated his schemes, is reasonable to assume.”

“And the rightful heir?” said Alfred.

“Was carried away to this country by Walther himself and left in obscurity to be brought up in complete isolation and separation from everything that pertained to

him or his. The Archduke did not even stop to learn the name of the people with whom he left him."

"Your tale, sir," said Alfred, "is indeed a strange one, and I take it that your mission here is to find the lost heir." John of Ainhault bowed. "And you were finding some difficulty in tracing him?"

"Yes, and until last night the search was threatening to become exceedingly difficult."

"Until last night?"

"Yes, at the opera."

"At the opera?"

"Yes, the Archduke who was present recognized him from the strong resemblance he bore to the Empress, his mother."

"And that man," said Alfred, now thoroughly interested.

"That man," said the other, repeating his words, "that man is yourself."

A death like silence rested upon all present.

Alfred Raymond stood as if dazed. He heard the words that answered to his question, but at first their full meaning failed to touch him; then, slowly they began to seep through his shocked senses like a deadly burning poison. They stung him in every part like a white hot iron. Then, out over the painful, breathless silence rang a defiant indignant denial.

"You lie!"

John of Ainhault staggered back as if smitten a terrific blow. He, a Royal Prince of an Imperial house, given the lie, as it were, square in the face. For a moment the blood forsook his face, leaving him fairly livid. He felt as if he

were choking. Then his manhood asserted itself. He gathered himself together as if for a mighty spring. The veins stood out upon his head and throat like whipcords.

Col. Miron stepped forward and spoke, "Your Highness, have a care."

He looked up and encountered those grand gray eyes of Alfred Raymond now blazing with a lurid light and he stepped back.

Almost at once that deadly light died out, and Alfred stepped forward with outstretched hands. "Pardon me," said he, "but I am not used to practical jokes, and, really," said he, "I do not like them, and I must ask you to let this ridiculous farce go no further." The gentle dignity of the man was wonderful.

"But," insisted John of Ainhault, "it is no farce; it is the truth."

"Really," began Alfred haughtily, and that dangerous light began to show again in his eyes when the other interrupted him.

"But I assure you it is no farce, it is the truth. The Archduke Walther is here himself; he recognized you at once, as I have said, from your strong resemblance to the Empress, your mother, who died at your birth."

Alfred turned pale. "But, gentlemen," said he with gentle patience, this is foolish; my mother is living with me here in this house; you have simply been misled by some fancied resemblance. I am very sorry to disappoint you, but you have made a mistake. You will pardon me but this interview does not appeal to me, so I beg you will excuse me and terminate it."

He stepped to the doorway and flung back the draperies. There was no mistaking his action.

"Your mother is living with you here," said the Archduke Walther, "will you permit us to see her?"

"Gentlemen," was the cold reply, "it is useless, I tell you that you have made a mistake, —"

"Oh, of course," said the Archduke Walther with a sneer, "if you fear to call her —"

"Stop!" Alfred turned white. A hot reply burned upon his lips, then he remembered that his mother had always taught him to be a man and a gentleman. He paused, a strange half pitying smile upon his face. He would call his mother and so end the whole ridiculous affair.

He walked to the foot of the staircase and called, "mother."

"Yes, Boy," was the reply.

"Will you come down?" His voice was ineffably sweet and tender.

A feeling of uneasiness began to pervade the waiting company. Some of them began to doubt. Suppose the Archduke were mistaken, the search would be more difficult than ever, and the present situation would be only the more awkward.

Only the Archduke Walther remained confident.

Presently a light step was heard descending the stair; then the soft rustle of a woman's garments. There was a low questioning exclamation, "What is it, Boy?"

In a moment Alfred re-entered the room bearing upon his arm a snowy-haired slender woman.

Margaret Raymond had changed greatly since last we

saw her. The luxuriant brown hair that adorned her head was now bleached to a silvery white. She had never recovered from the shock of that one bitter experience when she had forsaken her home for the safety of her children, while the long years of privation had gradually sapped her vitality; and now as she entered the room clad in the simple garments of the religious sect to which she belonged, her face calm, pale and spirituelle, she presented a striking, albeit, beautiful picture.

Only her fine brown eyes seemed to have retained their vitality and spirit.

She looked toward the waiting expectant men with a calm questioning glance.

Alfred started to speak, to explain, when he felt his mother's hand grip his arm fiercely.

She stepped forward toward the Archduke.

"You!" her voice rang out shrilly. "You! What do you want here?" Then she stepped back, and, placing herself between Alfred and the men, she flung out her arms, as if seeking to receive the blow aimed at him.

"Mother! Mother!" said he, "what do you mean? You do not know these men!" He caught her in his arms. "Why! you are trembling! Your hands are like ice! Surely, you do not know these people!"

"Alfred! Boy! Boy! That man!"

Slowly she put his arms away from her. An icy hand seemed laid upon him. He shuddered.

A deadly fear came over her. Fear for him.

He watched his mother as she turned toward the Archduke Walther.

She addressed herself to him.

"You have come for him?" Oh, the deadly calmness of her voice.

The man bowed.

"Let me sit down." They placed a chair for her.

"Call Margaret," said she, "she must know also."

All eyes were observing her closely.

As they obeyed her request, Margaret Raymond, the younger, came.

"Margaret," said the mother, "come and sit by me, I have something to tell, and you must hear it now."

Obedying her mother's request the younger woman drew a chair close beside her, and seating herself, she encircled that dear form in close loving embrace.

Alfred stood apart. The one solitary figure present. He seemed turned to stone.

Margaret Raymond turned toward him and stretched out her arms in piteous appeal.

"Boy, boy," said she, "I had never intended to have told you."

"Mother! Mother!" Oh, the sharp agony of that cry.

"Listen, Boy; I do not know who these men are. I do not know from whence they come. I only know that they have come for you, and now I must give you up."

"Mother! Mother! What are you saying? Give me up! Am I not your son?"

Margaret Raymond shook her head slowly and sadly, and at sight of that motion every vestige of color died out of the face of Alfred Raymond, leaving it ghastly and drawn.

"No, Boy," said she mournfully, "you are not my son."

I am not your mother. This man brought you to me when you were a little babe of not more than three or four weeks of age. I was alone. My parents were dead. One night someone rapped at my door. I, thinking it might be one of the neighbors, opened it; this man stepped in. He had a bundle on his arm. I thought nothing strange of that, as often work was brought me. I asked him to step in; he did so. He never spoke but laid the bundle in my arms. Immediately I knew that it was not an inanimate thing. In my surprise I remained speechless; he, after a moment, turned and went out, and, listening, I heard a vehicle being driven rapidly away; the bundle in my arms stirred, from it there came the cry of a child, and, opening it, I found you."

"My first thought was, Where should I take you? what should I do with you? It was so unexpected, so unthought of that I was seized with a great consternation. Your feeble cries roused me to action; I saw that it was from hunger that you were crying, so I quickly prepared food and fed you. While doing so your little baby hands clasped them upon mine, around my heart, around my life, and I began to realize that I did not want to let you go; that I could not let you go. When your tender baby form lay upon my breast, and my arms held you in close warm embrace, I determined, at whatever cost, I should keep you for my own. When John Raymond found you with me he showed me the position into which I had unconsciously placed myself, and to still the speech of people I consented to marry him and go away, at the same time I felt that as the man who had left you had asked no questions, nor made any comment, it might serve as a hindrance to their ever finding you again; and not for one instant have I ever regretted

my decision at that time, for you have been to me all that a son could be."

Simple, terse, plain, the whole story was told.

"Boy, Boy, can you ever forgive me the only deception I have ever practiced?"

Alfred had not moved; all the light and life seemed to have gone out of him; at those plaintive words he woke to life. He struggled and fought to throw off the mighty chains that seemed to have bound him hand and foot. He begged, he pleaded, he prayed her to tell him it was not true. He would not, he could not believe it.

"Go to him, Margaret," said the mother.

The younger woman rose, and as she did so she stood for a moment face to face with John of Ainhault; and as he looked into that beautiful fair face, and those velvety blue eyes, he wondered what manner of people these might be. He had come to this land fully expecting, as he had been taught, to find a country of semi-barbarians, but instead he had come face to face with such a degree of dignity and refinement, such wealth and power, as he had not thought could exist outside the cities of the old world; while its women, in beauty and grace, excelled any he had seen anywhere, and it was with eager longing eyes that he watched that beautiful girl, as, at her mother's bidding, she went to the brother she had loved so dearly, and with all the unstudied grace and simplicity of a child she laid her head upon his breast and clasping him close in her arms, said, as she pressed her pallid face to his icy cheek, "Alfred, my brother, listen to me, for you are my brother in the sight of God just as truly as if you had been made blood of my blood and flesh of my flesh."

At the sound of that low rich voice and those wonderful words, John of Ainhault started as if he had been stung. "Blood of my blood and flesh of my flesh," the veil dropped from before his eyes. Now he knew why he had not cared for woman before. Here was the one woman that his soul called for; but in that same instant he recognized that, hedged about by the laws and customs of his land, as he was, she was as far removed from him as the east was from the west and his great soul writhed in anguish; but her voice was going on, nor did he wish to lose one tone of it, now that he had heard it, while he knew that the sound of it would never leave him. "Bobo, you have not forgotten the dear little sister who has gone on before? You do not think that God sent you to us for nothing? Have you forgotten, dear one, what you said to mother the day I came? Listen, dear, listen to me; you are so distressed, I will tell you."

Like a child she soothed him, while an intense silence hung upon every, every tone of her young voice. "Mother has often told me; good Mrs. Beaton was there, and she took me up and you asked if you might touch me; don't you remember how my baby fingers closed around yours, and how you trembled, and then don't you remember how you went and whispered in mother's ear, 'Wasn't God good to bring me a little sister? For that was just what I wanted.' And the darling little sister who went away? Bobo," she was sobbing silently, now, and calling him by the old pet name. Gradually she was drawing him back from the black horror into which he had been drawn; he was becoming more quiet now.

John of Ainhault never removed his gaze from that

pathetic scene. To him she seemed some angelic spirit sent from Heaven to bring comfort and soothing, and his soul groaned for her; but she was speaking again after a short pause and he did not wish to lose one tone of that voice. "So what does it matter what they say or do, Bobo, you are ours and now more than ever. What does it matter whom they say you are; you are ours, dear one, mother's and mine, so nothing else can matter."

At last, exhausted, he was silent. The struggle had been terrible, and the pity was that no man, no, not even God Himself could help him. Upon the pitiless iron wheel of destiny he was bound hand and foot.

He was silent now with a horrible, deathly silence. His struggles had stopped. Those heart-breaking moans had ceased.

His mother rose, and seeing that broken bowed form, said, in a low voice, "Whom do they say that your are, Boy?"

John of Ainhault replied. "He is the son of the Emperor Paul of Carona, and heir to the greatest Empire in the world."

Margaret Raymond seemed to dilate and grow taller. Her voice rang out clear and distinct.

"What! That beast? That ingrate? That black-hearted wife murderer?" Her face became drawn with an inexpressible horror. "No! No! Not that! Not that! Oh, God in Heaven! Anything but that! Anything but that! Boy! Boy! Boy!" she called to him with fearful energy.

"Mother! Mother!" It was like a cry from the realms of the lost.

"Boy! Boy!" She took one step forward, then, like a flash he sprung forward, as she sunk down lifeless.

In his strong young arms he carried her to a couch, calling, "Madge! Madge! Call Dr. Burwell! Quick!"

There was the sound of running feet, then someone called at the phone.

Alfred laid his burden down, but did not see the great dark red stain upon the front of his coat; he saw only the ghastly-white face that lay upon his arm.

Someone stepped forward and spoke, "I am a physician, let me —"

"Stand back!" he almost shouted. "You have done enough of your hellish work! Madge! Come quick, bring some water, she has fainted!"

In an incredibly short time a motor dashed up to the door and stopped. The Doctor came hurriedly in. One sharp look into that white calm face and he knew that the thing that he had dreaded had transpired.

He called the maid and led the frightened girl from the room; then he went up to the kneeling man, and bending down, said gently, "Let me lay her down, Alfred."

Alfred looked into that kindly honest face, and at something he saw there his heart seemed to stop beating. The awful truth was out.

"Oh, Doctor," he moaned, "I cannot, I cannot; don't you see that if I lay her down I can never take her up again. She will be gone and I cannot find her. Oh, Doctor, think, think," and his voice rose in a heart-breaking sob, that shook him from head to foot. "When they brought me to her, a helpless, homeless, friendless babe, she did not let me go. She did not cast me out. She has never let me

go. She has never cast me out. She never even stopped to count the cost. She was willing to bear even the reproach of shame for me. Think! Oh, think of how she gave up her home, everything, and went out with her two helpless little ones into the darkness and the unknown world, facing all its difficulties, all its trials, willing to face even poverty itself for me; nor once did she falter. Doctor, all that I am to-day she has made me. Oh! I cannot let her go!"

"Then remember, Alfred," said Dr. Burwell kindly, "that she has made you a man; and that she would have you to be a man of whom she would not wish to be ashamed. Remember your sister, Margaret, you are all she has, and you will not fail her now."

Dr. Burwell was ignorant of the past as well as of the recent denouement. So he got him away. As he returned to the room he noticed the party of strangers, and as he looked inquiringly toward them, John of Ainhault stepped forward and said, "We were present when this — this distressing accident occurred. Here is my card; anything I can do, command me."

The party silently left the house. Only Col. Miron lingered without. After some hours he was relieved; another took his place. So the silent watch went on.

On the day that Burgmuller had succeeded in enlisting the aid of Alfred Raymond he chanced to meet Col. Miron upon the street, and learning from him of the presence of the Ducal party in the city, had placed the box at the opera at their disposal, and in that way the missing link in the chain was discovered, and the result we already know.

About ten o'clock of the morning of the day following

the sad tragedy at the home of Alfred Raymond a carriage stopped at the door. A footman in livery sprang down and opened the door. John of Ainhault descended and walked up the steps to the house, while the footman followed carrying a large package.

The maid admitted them. As the Archduke entered the hall he handed her his card and asked her to give it to Alfred Raymond, saying that he would deem it a great favor if he would see him. In a few moments she returned, saying that he would see his lordship, and requested him to pass into the music room.

After a few minutes, Alfred, for such we will continue to call him, came.

The change in the man from the time the Archduke had seen him enter before was striking. Then he had come, light, buoyant, almost eagerly expectant, flushed and glowing; now he entered slowly and lifeless. His handsome face, which had glowed so with health and happiness, was now pale to ghastliness.

Those great golden-gray eyes, that had glowed so like great jewels, were now dark and somber, while underneath lay a dark shadow, like a bruise upon the white flesh.

The Archduke rose and saluted.

The other bowed.

"You wished to see me?" The voice was low and calm.

"I beg that you will pardon what may seem like an unwarrantable intrusion at this time," said John of Ainhault, "but I have brought a small token of respect, and crave your permission to place it at — at —"

A spasm of pain passed over Alfred's face and his

lips quivered like a hurt child as he pressed his hand sharply against them.

The other stopped, not knowing how to proceed. He was aware of a painful choking in his throat; something he had never known before, and found himself unable to go on.

For a moment silence rested between them, then Alfred, mastering his emotion, said, "It is yours."

The Archduke stepped into the hall, and at a sign from him the footman opened the package as he held out his arms and drew from it a magnificent mass of fragrant white lilies, cunningly woven, and laid it over them, so that as they lay upon his outstretched arms they looked like a great white robe.

When he re-entered the room Alfred stepped forward and drew back the doors that separated the two rooms, motioning him to enter.

Within a gray velvet-covered satin-lined casket, so made that the front and side let down and looked a part of the draped divan upon which it rested, all that was mortal of Margaret Raymond lay.

Robed in the silver-gray of the religious sect to which she belonged; her pale worn hands crossed upon her breast, her feet shod with the same color as her dress, her snowy-white hair parted and drawn softly back from her fair white brow and face, from which every line had been erased by the hand of death, she looked like some wonderful high-priestess returning in triumph to the God at whose bidding she had come forth to serve, and now, her labor ended, she was returning at the summons of that Great King to receive the greatest reward that could be bestowed upon mortal. "Well done, good and faithful servant, thou has been

faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

With reverently bowed head John of Ainhault moved forward and laid his gift along and over the back of the casket, from which it seemed to drop down and over the shoulder of the silent sleeper within like a veritable Robe of Glory.

Sinking upon one knee with lowly bended head, he involuntarily repeated the prayer for the dead of his church; realizing suddenly for the first time, that the same God who ruled there was the one and supreme God of the whole world, and the loving Father of all.

As they returned to the rear room, he turned toward Alfred with outstretched hand, and with a look of pathetic beseeching upon his fine face, said, "Will you not take my hand?"

Alfred stood for a moment, then stepping quickly forward, he grasped those strong friendly hands in his own with a firm grasp.

For a moment the two men stood motionless, then John of Ainhault dropped upon one knee, and touching those hands first with his lips, he carried them to his forehead, then to his heart, as he murmured, "My Liege and my Prince."

A moment later and he was gone.

CHAPTER XIII

“And I heard a voice saying unto me, Right, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; Yea, saith the Spirit that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.”

John of Ainhault was standing in the midst of a small company of men at a few paces from the open grave.

The warm golden sunlight of the October day rested upon the little gathering in the burying ground at Westport where they had assembled to lay all that was mortal of Margaret Raymond away in the grave, with a gentle soothing touch.

The oaken box, which contained the gray velvet-covered casket, rested above the yawning grave. The last sad rites were about to be performed, when there occurred a slight pause. Then upon the hushed little company those words fell like an Heavenly Benediction; immediately all heads were uncovered, as the words were repeated, and looking up the Archduke saw standing near the head of the grave a quiet, unprepossessing looking man, clad in long sober-gray garments, wearing a high-crowned broad-brimmed hat.

As the speaker proceeded, he forgot the man and saw only the grand character and noble life of the woman who had gone on before, as portrayed by this simple homely man in a few clean bold strokes, like a picture done by some skilled artist.

As he heard the wonderful life story of this noble woman, and realized the grand character as it was portrayed by this masterly hand, he wondered, with a deep wordless wonder; as we have said, he had come to these people expecting to find at best but a rough uncouth race, and instead he had found but the finest and noblest. In his land, and in his sphere, he had come to believe that only the so-called "better class" could enter upon the higher, holier walks of life and accomplish great and noble things, and here he had found a people who were not ashamed to labor with their hands. Ashamed! Far from it! It was their pride. In fact their very labor ennobled and dignified them; and those things which he had come to think were highest and noblest were to these simple, grand people but a part of their daily walk and conversation.

He heard the words spoken by this man as he had never yet heard them spoken by Priest or Archbishop, "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth; for the Lord hath spoken it."

The voice stopped. A man stepped forward. It was the undertaker. There was a slight pause. In arranging the last sad rites the lowering of the casket had been overlooked. The undertaker looked helplessly around and encountered the eyes of the Archduke John. Just a glance, then John of Ainhault stepped forward and took the upper right hand strap, Sir Isaac Davis took the left, Admiral Sefton took the lower right and Col. Miron took the left.

Slowly the casket swung clear; the props were re-

moved, and then, without jar or jolt, the body of Margaret Raymond slowly sank to its final resting place.

Never has royal king or potentate ever received more princely burial than was thus accorded this simple noble woman.

John Raymond, dark, silent, stood a little apart, stricken to the soul; he had sinned, sinned grievously, and now he was paying the penalty; the bitter penalty.

Only separated from him by a few feet stood the noble man, the boy he had so outrageously mistreated, the foster son of his noble, beautiful wife.

Together with that son stood his daughter, in part the image of the grand woman who had now passed on.

It seemed to him that an impassable gulf was fixed separating him from them. Just then Friend Nathan Arnold stepped up to Alfred and said, as he stood with outstretched hand, "Friend Alfred and Friend Margaret, I have a communication from Friend Margaret, who has just passed on from us, which I would like to deliver as soon as the last duties here are performed," indicating the filling of the grave. "Will you come to my house or—"

At that John Raymond stepped forth, having heard the remark, and said, "Would it not be well, Friend Arnold, for you to come to my house?"

At the sound of that voice Alfred Raymond looked up quickly. It was the voice he had not heard for nearly twenty years, and it rolled back the intervening years like a scroll, and thus looking up, the eyes of Alfred and his foster father met, and both felt that the time had come when all shadows, uncertainties and misunderstandings must forever be dispersed. Then like a flash the thought

burst upon him with an overwhelming force that he had no part against this man; that a power, over which he had not even a shadow of influence, had cast him, a frail bit of wreckage, into the life of the woman who so nobly had befriended and sheltered him. She had belonged to them, they to her. But he was nothing to them; he was but a thing apart. And as he felt the pressure of the soft clasp of Margaret Raymond upon his arm the utter isolation of his position stabbed him to the soul with a piercing keenness.

This beautiful girl whom he had idolized as his own baby sister, whom he had loved so and watched over so jealously and carefully through the years, and the dear little one who had gone on so long before, were they after all nothing to him? The agony of it seemed almost more than he could bear.

He could hear that awful rattling sound as they led him away, and through it he could hear the calm voice of Friend Nathan Arnold, who had misinterpreted his silence, saying, "You must acknowledge, Alfred, that your father has some rights and privileges that we are in duty bound to recognize," Friend Nathan Arnold being in ignorance of Alfred's true birth.

Margaret Raymond moved on at his side, almost overwhelmed by the sad and tragic death of her mother, hearing those words became painfully aware that another crisis was at hand.

She had heard the request of Friend Nathan Arnold, and the reply from the dark silent man who stood near by, and as she heard his name spoken it was with a dazed feeling of astonishment that she began to realize that she was looking upon her own father.

In the meantime Alfred had yielded to the appeal of the two men; in fact, so eager had they both been to bring about that which they both believed to be the most comfortable results that they had not noticed that the man was more dazed and overwhelmed by the recent catastrophe than from any personal reluctance to comply.

After a few moments they returned to the grave. But what a transformation! They had seen that yawning dark gash in the earth, that pile of unseemly raw ground, but now instead, where before all had betokened sorrow, tragedy and agony, now all bespoke only beauty, fragrance and holiness. Over that cruel wound upon the face of the fair beautiful earth was stretched a magnificent robe of spotless white golden-hearted lilies, breathing out their fragrance like a prayer of hope upon the air.

Walther, Archduke, in charge of Admiral Sefton, Sir Isaac Davis, and the remainder of the party, had departed. Col. Miron lingered without near the waiting vehicle.

Within the living room of the old Raymond home were gathered John and Margaret Raymond, his daughter, who now for the first time stood beneath her father's roof, Alfred Raymond, Friend Nathan Arnold and John of Ainhault.

In suchwise had they kept watch, that waking or sleeping not for one moment had Alfred escaped the strict espionage they had set upon him from the first time they had found him.

Born a prisoner of state and circumstances, by circumstances flung and reared in a life of absolute independence and freedom, now at the beginning of a wonderfully promising career, though all unconscious, we find

him betrayed by the same circumstances, again a prisoner of state and circumstances.

The warm gentle rays of the October sun bathed the old oak-raftered room with its quaint homely sitting in a soft mellow light.

Alfred had seated himself near a table at one side of the room, his head resting upon the hand that shaded his handsome pallid face, while Margaret, having removed her bonnet and wrap, now drew a chair up beside him, and taking his disengaged hand held it closely clasped in both of hers.

John of Ainhault, half hidden within the deep recess of one of the windows, remained standing, and looking upon the gold-crowned head and beautiful face of the young girl, felt that to him had been vouchsafed a glimpse of Paradise, but with a keen smart he realized that it was a Paradise not for him.

Suddenly, a mad, wild thought flashed through his brain that almost made him reel from the place where he stood. He put his hand out as if to ward off a sudden attack.

He had often heard of men who had flung away all that life had held most dear and he had scoffed. And now he—he, John of Ainhault, Prince of Polen, was tempted as almost never man was tempted before.

For this fair beautiful girl he, John of Ainhault, was sorely tempted to fling everything aside and cast in his lot with this wonderful people, with this wonderful country, if he could only win this peerless woman for his own.

At that moment his glance rested upon the bowed head and form of Alfred Raymond, and at that sight all the rigid

insurmountable difficulties of his position stood out before him intensified a thousand fold.

Had he not already acknowledged his allegiance to this unknown Prince of his father's house? Had not his very heart and soul already gone out in love and fealty to this terribly stricken man? And unknown to himself John of Ainhault was unconsciously, yet consciously, striving to comply to the Divine injunction, "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

Just at that moment Friend Nathan Arnold drew forth a packet of papers and laid them upon the table beside him.

John Raymond had taken a seat across the room from where he could plainly see.

Slowly and deliberately Friend Nathan Arnold drew out his spectacles, and after having removed his hat, wiped them and carefully adjusted them.

"These papers, friends," said he, "were entrusted to me by Friend Margaret at the time she journeyed back from New York, about eighteen years ago, to place beside her parents the remains of her infant daughter, asking me to take charge of them, and appointing me trustee of the estate left to her by her father and mother.

"At that time she related to me, in part, the reason she had for having so suddenly left her home and her husband's house."

John Raymond's face was turned away, nor would he meet the look turned upon him by Friend Nathan Arnold.

The speaker continued: "Among them, she said, was a letter addressed to me, which, in the event of her death, she wished me to read to you, explaining that there were a

few things which must be made known to all before the business part of the trust could be entered upon.

“The letter I hold in my hand now; the seal is unbroken; and obeying the request she made of me at that time I now break it in your presence.”

There was a pause, interrupted only by the snapping of the wax, which had dried and hardened with the passing of the years, and the rustling of the paper as Friend Nathan Arnold drew it from the wrapper.

All were intensely interested, only Alfred never moved, almost it seemed that he had not heard.

John Raymond grew pale. Margaret drew a little closer to Alfred and leaned lightly against his shoulder. John of Ainhault watched the scene closely.

Friend Nathan Arnold was reading. The letter was the story Margaret Raymond had told to Alfred and the Imperial party and the first part was addressed to the reader. At the conclusion of that part, Friend Nathan Arnold remained with bowed head, buried in deep thought. No one present seemed to wish to break the painful silence. At length he resumed, and in this part she gave a full explanation of her reason for leaving her husband and her home and remaining so long in seclusion. As the reader slowly pursued his way through that part of the letter it was with great difficulty that he seemed able to control himself, but succeeding in keeping his deep inward feeling from mastering him, he continued.

John Raymond, as he listened to this dark recital of the past, was overwhelmed with shame; all the hideous past stood out in all its ghastly nakedness. John of Ain-

hault listened in horrified silence. But the reader was going on.

“And now, oh, my daughter,” this part of the letter was addressed to Margaret, “that you know that the boy whom I let the world call my son, and whom I called Alfred Raymond, the boy whom I let the world call my son, and whom I called Alfred Raymond —”

At the sound of those words Alfred felt a deathly numbness stealing over him, the awful, cruel past had been called up with all of its painful memories, and, but for the warm, firm pressure of those little hands upon his cold ones, he felt he must have gone mad. And still that deep, kindly, gentle voice went on: “the boy whom I called Alfred Raymond, will be all alone in the world when I am gone, and I want you, my daughter, to take my place and be mother as well as sister to him.

“When I think upon the night he came to me, a little, helpless, tiny, frail bit of humanity, cast up by the great sea of the world, helpless, homeless, friendless, my soul faints within me as I wonder what manner of men these must be who would commit such a brutal deed as this, and yet I feel to thank God that it was so, for surely woman never yet bore son who has been a more true son, and greater comfort and joy than Alfred has been to mine and to me. And now, my daughter, as I have said before, remember that you are all that he has now; love and cherish him for my sake as well as for his and your own; all that I have I have caused to be given to him and to you; he is my son from the hand of God, as you, my daughter, are mine, flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood. Honor and respect your mother.

Margaret Rathmore Raymond.”

The letter was finished; the papers were read that divided the goodly estate left to Margaret Raymond, between Alfred and Margaret. Friend Nathan Arnold was laying them in order preparatory to delivering them up, when Alfred rose slowly to his feet, gently disengaging Margaret's clasp from his hand.

At that moment all eyes were turned wonderingly upon him; his face was white and drawn with pain; the awful agony that had rested there at the tragic death of the woman whom he had idolized as his mother, was replaced with such a look of desolation that the eyes of those who beheld him filled with hot, burning tears.

"Friend Nathan Arnold," oh, the dreariness of that voice. "I may call you that, mayn't I?" The other bowed, not daring to trust his voice.

"Until a few days ago I believed myself to be the son of her, the only woman I ever named the sacred name of mother. Can you understand the awful shock I received when I learned that I was nothing to her; only an alien? That I had no claim upon her, even when I knew that everything that I have and am in life I owe to her? Yes; almost my very existence I owe to her. When I think how she took me, a homeless, nameless waif, nor stopped one instant to question or demur, but accepted the trust imposed upon her; can you for one moment understand the agony of my heart? I have often wondered what those lost souls must feel who are forever condemned to eternal punishment. How they have felt, when looking back upon Heaven they have lost, at finding themselves shut without in darkness and despair."

His voice sunk to a hoarse whisper as his head dropped

low. "Now I have found out. You hold in your hands the instrument that conveys one-half of her estate to me. I wish you to draw up immediately a form, wherein I relinquish every claim in favor of her daughter and only child, Margaret Raymond."

They would have interrupted him, but he held up his hand and stayed their objections.

"You do not know who and what I am, and I will tell you." Oh, the bitterness of his words. "They tell me that I am the son of that black-hearted profligate, that monster in human form, the Emperor Paul."

Friend Nathan Arnold stood transfixed with horror. John Raymond buried his face in his hands and shook as with an ague. John of Ainhault hung his head with shame. With the pure eyes and soul of this man he saw the hideous rottenness of his father's house as he had never seen it before.

Alfred was going on. His voice rose in terrible dreariness.

"Already my feet take hold on Hell, they go down, down into the miry pit——"

"Alfred!" A piercing scream rent the air. He was sitting upon a broad settee. Margaret was holding him in her beautiful young arms like a little child, his head pillowed upon her breast; the tears rained down from her eyes and fell upon his marble white face. "Alfred! Stop! Stop! Listen to me! Listen to me! I am Margaret. The little baby Margaret that you loved so; I am the sister mother gave to you. You are the son God gave to her. You are hers, you are mine, and nothing else matters. Oh, my brother, my brother," she moaned, rocking herself to and

fro. "Don't! don't say those awful things; oh, you break my heart. Listen, Boy," calling him by the old pet name, "Mother gave you to me and I am so glad; oh, my mother, my mother," she cried, "to think that I never knew the half of all you have been and done for us. You gave him to me, and now you are gone and I can never make it up to you. Oh, why! why did you carry this sorrow alone?"

She was weeping bitterly, and as those terrible sobs shook her, Friend Nathan Arnold said, as he put his arm around her and lifted her up to his great heart, "There daughter, don't cry, don't cry, your mother knows now, and knew before the love both her dear ones had for her, and now, dearie," oh, the tenderness of the man; "the good Father in Heaven has called her home to himself, and can't we trust Him, dearie? Can't we trust Him? Trust Him,

"Where the wicked cease from troubling,
And the weary are at rest?"

After a little she became calmer. The time of parting had come. She turned to her father, "I am my mother's daughter. I will not deceive you in aught. That my place is in your house, as you say, I recognize, but I must ask you that you do not seek to require much of me, but let me live near you quietly, and perhaps time may help us both and draw us near to each other. Friend Nathan Arnold, I wish to say a few things to you that you will not misjudge or misunderstand me, but I will probably go many times over there;" and as she spoke she pointed to where the gleaming white stones in the graveyard could be seen in the rays of the sinking sun.

"You are a father, and you know how natural it is

for a little child, when its mother leaves the room to watch her in her going, and especially how the little longing eyes watch the door through which the mother has passed; and if the child were old enough, you have seen how it has made its way to the door and waited for the loved one." The older man bowed. "So, too, shall I go many times to that place, but do not think that I go to grieve or mourn, or that I go to worship that mound or that which rests beneath it; but it is out through that gateway that she went into the other life; and I am only like the little one you have seen, when at times I shall go for a little, and rest, and wait, and maybe watch at that same gate."

"God bless you, my child," said he.

Then she turned to John of Ainhault, her face pale, her eyes sad, and, holding out her hands, she laid them in his, saying, "The time has come to part, you have come for him, and now he must go; but remember he is your charge, from me, and one day I shall demand a faithful accounting of your trust."

John of Ainhault, strong man though he was, trembled as he felt those soft, white hands laid so confidently in his, bent low and touched them to his lips, then carried them against his heart, saying in a low voice, "Dearest lady, I accept the charge and one day, God help me, to render unto you a good and true account of my stewardship."

John Raymond held out his hand. "Alfred, will you take my hand, and taking it, will you try to forgive me the wrong I did to you and your mother?"

Alfred took the proffered hand in a firm clasp and said, "I have nothing to forgive, for you did not know." Then turning to Friend Nathan Arnold, he said, "Friend

Nathan Arnold, I have told you whom I am, but before you touch me, answer me one question. How can a clean thing come from an unclean?"

Friend Nathan Arnold bowed his head in thought, his lips moved as if he prayed; as he raised his eyes, his glance went past the man before him out at the window beyond.

All were watching him closely, each one present felt that upon his reply the entire destiny of the man before him hung.

His gaze seemed to concentrate, to grow brighter, they saw him gather himself together like a mighty warrior about to do battle in the interest of right. A look of holy assurance seemed to irradiate his features.

He stepped forward, and taking the soul-stricken man by the hand, he led him to the window. All watched him with wonder as he raised his free hand, and, pointing to a distant pool of water, he said, "Alfred, do you see yonder pool of water that gleams and sparkles in the sunlight, like a beautiful jewel in its setting of emerald green?"

Alfred bowed.

"You do not know, as this is your first visit to this place, that that bit of sparkling, clear water covers a deep and vast bed of black, filthy muck. Were you to enter into it and go below the clear water and become covered with its slime, and ooze, and stain, it would be long before you could become clean from it; and yet, at certain seasons of the year, great bucketfuls of it are drawn up and spread over the land, and its value to the crops cannot be estimated; and so would it not be well for us not to name a thing filth or slime or to call it unclean? You ask, how can a clean thing come from an unclean? I will answer you.

Over on the far side of the pool there is a wide bay, and in the summer, up from its black miry depths spring great dark, glossy, velvety lily pads and cover the entire surface with a carpet more beautiful and wonderful than any yet conceived and woven by the mind and hand of man; then, one day, up from between the dark pads we see rising innumerable dark green pods, and we watch and wait to see what this new development portends, when, lo! as the sun pours his rich, warm, golden rays from the eastern horizon, those dark, silent pods have burst and hundreds, yea thousands, of the most beautiful, waxen, golden-hearted lilies have opened up in absolute purity and are shedding their exquisite perfume upon the air, such a perfume as cannot be reproduced by the hand of man; such a delicate waxen beauty that no other blossom can excel; and more, the wild deer of the forest come down in the early morning, and find food and nourishment within those dark, silent, glossy pads; and thus is even that which we call the slime and filth of the earth made to serve the ends of man.

“Friend Alfred,” and his voice took on a tone of deep solemnity, “the mother who bore you, though in bitter agony and sorrow, was a holy woman. God’s veritable handmaid upon earth, yet it was neither in sin or shame that she conceived you, but became rather the chosen vessel in the hands of her God to do His Divine will. The mother,” and it was here that he spoke with peculiar and marked accent; “the mother who reared you became another chosen instrument in His hands for carrying on the Divine purpose. When death removed the mother who bore you, you were in danger of becoming nothing but a petted, pampered, spoiled and vicious princeling, then the Divine Father interposed, and through the channels of am-

bition and trickery, removed you from all such danger and temptation, and by the hand that would have wrought you the greatest wrong and harm He brought you the greatest safety and good.

“The mother He chose to rear and train you was not a woman of many words, but a woman of wonderful insight and spirituality, a woman who so shaped her life and lived her creed that, in the lives of the children she has reared, she leaves the grandest monument that can be lifted to woman’s work and memory.

“You say that all you are she has made you. You have made a large and bold declaration; see to it that you verify your own words and prove her acts. Make this assertion true ‘she welcomed a charge, a child, she has given back a man.’ Alfred Raymond, Boy, dishonor not the woman who bore you; belie not the woman who reared you.” For a moment each looked into the face of the other and their souls were bared; then the younger man sank upon his knee. The hands of the older man were raised; slowly they descended until they rested upon the bowed head; then he placed his left hand under the chin and lifted the splendid face to the light of the departing day; and gently laying the tips of his fingers against the broad white forehead, said, “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.”

Moonlight shone bright on the gleaming white marble in the graveyard; clear and bright on the casement where Margaret Raymond sat long in the night; on the train speeding though the dark, bearing Alfred Raymond on, still on into the great unknown future.

CHAPTER XIV

The half-hour whistle had sounded, warning all who lingered that the time for farewells was rapidly diminishing; all was bustle and excitement.

Upon the dock of the great liner was gathered the usual crowd of sightseers; some had come down hoping to catch a last glimpse of departing friends; some had come from off the vessel, and lingered, calling out parting greetings and good-byes to loved ones; the usual idle onlookers were also present.

The chief officer had mounted to his position; there were but fifteen minutes before the last line must be cast off. Already the officer of the dock had stationed his men at the different lines. The fiery little tugs, like fierce demons, were beginning to shriek out their shrill signals.

The Captain took out his watch and, after studying it for a moment, turned and looked anxiously toward the door at the entrance of the dock.

At the eleventh hour he had received orders to reserve the finest suite on the vessel, with as many adjacent suites as he could command; and the order having come from the official head of the company had convinced him that a party of unusual importance was coming aboard.

Ten minutes remained and he was beginning to grow somewhat uneasy, when a carriage dashed down the driveway of the great shed, closely followed by a second.

In the excitement of the late and hurried arrival, no one noticed that two men, in ordinary civilian dress, had

immediately detached themselves from the waiting crowd and took their station on either side of the door of the first carriage, while a third stepped up to the door on the opposite side.

One of the men opened the door and Alfred Raymond descended and walked toward the gangway which remained let down. As he stepped upon the plank a party of men descended from the second carriage and followed him aboard the ship; they were John of Ainhault, Col. Miron, Sir Isaac Davis and the attendants who were waiting upon the dock when the two carriages had arrived.

As Alfred came upon the deck of the vessel, at a sign from Col. Miron, a man moved quietly forward and murmuring a low, "This way, Sir," led the way to the great salon, the doors to which were flung wide apart.

As they approached the door of the suite that was to be his upon the voyage, another man quietly opened the door and saluted as he passed through alone, then closed the door behind him.

Upon entering the luxurious suite an attendant stepped forward to relieve him of his hat and coat which he had thrown over his arm.

He seemed as if moving in a dream. The tragic events of the past few days had followed so closely upon each other that they had served to keep him in a state of continued bewilderment.

When the subject of crossing the ocean had been broached, they had informed him that the two great iron-clads, which were then lying in the harbor, were ready to convey him across; adding that, as the Imperial Prince and

heir to the throne, he should travel as befitted his rank and station.

Reared in the most democratic of countries, and the most perfect freedom, the idea was to him most distasteful, and he at once vetoed the arrangement; when they tried to reason with him he had most emphatically settled the question under discussion by saying that unless he could travel as a private citizen, without any unnecessary show, he would decline leaving the American shore; which circumstance had necessitated the changing of the entire plan at almost the last hour.

As the man stepped forward Alfred raised his eyes.

The man saluted; that strange salute again.

"Your Highness."

Alfred stopped him with a quick gesture. "You are here——"

"To serve you, Sir," was the reply.

"I shall not need you," was the calm rejoinder. "I will serve myself; you may go." Then he added more kindly, for the espionage which had been set upon him, and which he had begun to feel, was beginning to gall him, "I will call if I want you."

He waited until he heard the man depart by an inner door, then, hastily laying down his hat and coat, he followed and bolted it; then returning, securely fastened the main entrance.

The man on duty without, hearing the bolt shot in the socket, and feeling troubled, sent for Col. Miron, and related the circumstance; in the meantime the attendant whom Alfred had dismissed, appeared and told what had transpired inside; both men then awaited orders. Receiv-

ing them, the one attendant departed, while the other lingered upon the divan near by seemingly busied in reading a paper; Col. Miron taking a position at one of the windows, idly watched the great liner being swung slowly out from her dock by the fussy little tugs.

Alfred, in the meanwhile, had thrown himself upon a couch, his face buried in his folded arms; how long he lay there he did not know; from his deep dejection he was roused by a strange feeling. He sat up, and looked idly, vaguely around; for a few moments he seemed almost unable to collect his scattered thoughts.

That strange sensation was continuing now, more pronounced than before. What was it? It seemed to thrill and vibrate in all around him. It began to take on a steadiness like a pulsation, something almost like a great heart throb, then something like the rush of blood through the veins and arteries, something that seemed like life itself flowing all about him. What was it? He looked about him; this strange room, it looked like a room on board ship; he could see through an open door a beautifully appointed sleeping room. Why this must be a ship. What was he doing on a ship?

Then his mind went back to the theatre, the dim, obscure lights, the low sobbing of the orchestra; he could hear it now in the way that steady breathing and throbbing continued.

Out there was his mother, and he was singing to her. Oh, how his throat ached. His mother? Something cut him like a hot blade. His mother was dead, and he could hear the words, "That man is yourself." He? What did they mean? They said that he was the Crown Prince, the

son of the Emperor; he laughed aloud at the ridiculousness of such a thing. At the sound of his own wild laugh he came back to consciousness. That throbbing. That trembling. What was it? Ah, he knew. It was the propeller of the great vessel beating, beating, and at every turn they were carrying him farther and farther away from his home, his friends, his all.

He must stop them! He must go back! It was all a mistake. A great mistake! He would tell them.

Hastily he snatched up a cap and thrust it upon his head. What transformation is this? The face is flushed. The eyes glow and burn. The cap is pressed far back from the broad white forehead and beautiful gold-brown hair. Ah! How like the boy of old. Eager. Expectant. Hurry! Hurry!

Across the room he rushed, shot back the bolt, tore open the door and rushed across the great salon toward the door. As he approached, the leaves slid back as if moved by some invisible hand.

With a quick, springing step, like the boy of old, he darted across the broad deck to the rail. For a moment he stood transfixed; then he leaned forward, out, out, his arms far stretched, all his soul in his eyes, his hands held out in piteous appeal, as he saw the shore slowly slipping, slipping farther away; then out over the dark, turbid waters, broke the saddest cry that ever welled up from human throat. "My Land! My Country! My Home!"

Some passengers standing near heard the low, bitter, passionate cry, and looking in that direction, saw only a group of men standing idly near the rail; but they did not

see that bending form as it leaned far out with outstretched hands and arms.

Farther, farther away, receded the land; farther and farther, until only a dark line was visible.

Slowly the outstretched arms sank; lower, lower, then the hands touched something that was soft; something that was warm.

Alfred looked down. An arm rested along the rail before him. Now he could feel his left shoulder pressing against something that throbbed, that thrilled with life. He turned his head. Col. Miron was standing, his left side against the heavy rail of the vessel with his left arm resting upon it, but the face of the old warrior was turned straight to the front, with fixed, unseeing eyes.

As the scarred old veteran stood there and felt that splendid young body resting almost in his arms against his great heart, all the soul of him went out to that grand young life that now throbbed and quivered with its untold agony, and that now must touch his so closely; and from the depths of his heart he vowed fealty toward this, his new found Prince.

Alfred stepped slowly back from the rail, and, as he saw the group standing around, and the grim figure and position of Col. Miron, a dark flush burned for a moment against the pallor of his face.

Slowly he retreated until he reached an iron pillar that supported the roof of the deck; there he stopped, and leaning lightly against it, he watched, with dull, somber eyes, the dim receding line of land that was fast disappearing from view.

The minutes slipped by and grew into hours, and still

he lingered; darkness came and shut out the view, still he moved not. Some strolling passengers wondered at the dark, silent figure, but no one addressed him.

At last a long, low sigh broke from his set lips; a sigh that was almost like a moan.

The land he loved, adored, had seemingly, with the darkness, slipped into the sea as into a grave; to him it seemed that it was no more; it, with the past, was gone; never to return. He felt infinitely sad; a sudden weariness came over him. He turned. "Col. Miron," the voice was low, scarcely above a whisper. Close at his elbow came the reply, "Yes; Your Highness."

"I wish to speak to you."

"I am at your service; command me."

"Will you go with me?"

"At your wish."

Alfred moved toward the brilliantly lighted salon. Again the great leaves of the door rolled back. Within, the great room was almost deserted. Thus proceeding, they reached the suite occupied by Alfred; the door was thrown open and they entered.

As the door closed, Alfred turned to Col. Miron and said, "Col. Miron, I feel that I owe you an apology;" the other made a motion of dissent. "Hear me out; I will not keep you long. When I realized my position at the rail, why, why were you so near to me?"

Those grand, golden-gray eyes were turned full upon the face of the old warrior, and there was that in them which forbade evasion.

"I thought ——, I thought ——"

Alfred's head was held proudly erect, nor once did his

eyes falter though a slight flush burned upon his cheek as he said, "Col. Miron, remember that the son of my mother can never be a coward."

Miron bowed low.

"And now, as to the position in which I have found myself so suddenly and strangely placed. I have not yet accepted that position as fixed or certain. I cannot help but feel yet that there is some mistake, which I will not deceive you, I devoutly hope and pray may be true. So, until every doubt is removed from my mind, every uncertainty swept away, I wish to be treated as an ordinary citizen. The order of surveillance to which I have been subjected in the last few days, has grown very distasteful to me, and I wish it to cease; see to it."

"But, Your ——"

Alfred stopped him. "All of that must stop. I will come and go among you as an ordinary passenger, as I have no wish to excite any undue curiosity, as the present course would do if continued. I will move in and among you as one of you; if at any time I desire to be left alone, I will let you become aware of my wishes, and above all, none of my words or acts must be allowed to excite any attention, or comment. You understand me?"

"It shall be as you wish, Sir."

"Thank you, Col. Miron; and now I wish to say that I am sorry that I was so selfish as to keep you waiting so long upon me, as I did to-night, Colonel," and he held out his hand as he spoke. "Be my friend, for I need you."

Col. Miron stood for a moment, his face almost transfigured, then he swung forward with all the grace and dignity of his years of honest, honorable, service, and,

grasping that outstretched hand in both of his, bent his knee to the ground. Touching the hand to his lips, to his forehead, he then carried it to his heart as he murmured, "My Master and my Prince."

A moment of silence, then the door closed and he was gone.

CHAPTER XV

Farmer Jim Beaton was busy down at the barn, trying to repair an old hay-rigging. It was fast approaching time to gather in the corn crop. While the weather had been fine for harvesting, there was no assurance that a cold, rainy season might not set in at almost any time, and, while it might not bring any disastrous results, yet could produce much confusion, and Farmer Jim always prided himself upon being, as he expressed it, "Right forehanded."

So he was busily pounding and hammering away, when, in a little lull in the din he was producing, hearing his name sharply called, he stepped to the door to investigate.

"Jim," called Mary Beaton from the front porch of the house, "isn't that John Raymond's rig coming down the hill?"

He looked long and earnestly. "Looks powerful like it, mother." Then, after a pause, he continued: "Yes, it is, and there's someone with him; a woman."

Mary Beaton rose hurriedly and, laying aside her work, hastened down the walk toward the front gate, considerably agitated.

"A woman! Jim. You don't spose it's ——"

"Margaret?" said he, finishing her question.

"Yes."

"No, mother," he replied.

"But Jim, you know his people are all gone, and I never knew him to drive out with any woman before ——"

she was growing more and more agitated. "Jim, you don't think he has gone and ——"

"Married again? No," said he. "He could not do that, as he does not know whether Margaret is living yet or not, and John is not the man to put himself in any such position, especially since, since ——"

"Yes, Jim; I know." Meanwhile the wagon was coming nearer. Both were watching it intently, now silent with wonder and their own thoughts.

By this time they were able to recognize the dark features of John Raymond, but it was not John they were looking at.

Mary Beaton trembled in every fibre of her being. Jim grew slowly pale beneath the tan of his honest, kindly face.

Who was this fair-haired, blue-eyed girl that made them think so of Margaret Raymond?

John Raymond was lifting her down; then she turned toward the wondering, waiting woman.

The warm October sunlight filtered down through the highly-colored leaves overhead, and fell upon the beautiful, pale face.

Mary Beaton saw the beautiful new church again, the light from the rich, stained-glass windows; she heard the great organ, then she heard a baby voice say "Awfed," she felt a little baby form clasped close to her heart, a little baby hand pressed to her lips, then, "Jim! Jim! It's Margaret, little baby Margaret."

She held out her arms. "My little one! Come! Oh, I have waited so long! Thank God! Oh, thank God!"

And the fair head was pillowed upon that desolate, aching, loving heart.

After a little, Mary Beaton lifted her up and, holding her off at arms' length, gazed long and earnestly, then she said, "My little girl! My little girl!" Then she added, as she half turned her toward her husband, who had remained motionless, "Go to him, dearie, go to him, we have waited so long, and we have been so lonely."

Margaret Raymond, fair as a lily, artless as a child, went to him, and folding her beautiful arms around his neck, laid her head upon his breast. And as his great arms enfolded her, Jim Beaton kissed the fair, white brow that lay so near his face, and thought of the boy who had lain there so long ago.

"I asked my father to bring me over," Margaret was saying, "I wanted to see you so much, and I thought maybe you would let me ——"

"No," said Mary Beaton. "We are not going to let you anything, but we are going to keep you, keep you just as long as we can; aren't we, Jim?"

To which he gave a hearty assent.

After the tea things were cleared away and John Raymond had departed, for he had refused to stay, as he said that he could not be away from home long at that time, Jim called Margaret to him and asked her to go with him.

Throwing a light wrap over her head she went.

Down to the corner of the barn he led her, and then he pointed out the line of a little path that had long since passed away, down across the great meadow to the old rail fence; and he told her of the little boyish form, and white bared feet that had trodden that path so long ago,

until it had worn a path into the gateway of their hearts, which neither time nor death would fade.

Mary Beaton was sitting on the front porch of the house watching, when she saw that slender, girlish form start away from the side of the silent man. Slowly the young girl made her way down across the great meadow, the new Shep walking slowly beside her.

On she went, almost like one walking in a dream.

Jim Beaton looked intently toward the old rail fence.

What did he expect? Almost, it seemed to him he must see a bounding, agile figure come flying across the fence to meet that slowly-moving white one.

On she went slowly. At last she reached the fence and stopped, and leaning her arms upon it, gazed long and earnestly toward the distant wood. The dog lay at her feet and waited.

Twilight gathered as the moon rose gloriously full above the eastern hills, bathing the scene in a beautiful opaline light.

Mary Beaton came down from the porch and stood by the gate; then she called, low and clear, the light, still air carrying with wonderful clarity.

"Margaret, won't you come now? We want you, Jim and I."

Back across the meadow she came, a beautiful, ethereal figure in the moonlight, the dog at her side.

Upon the porch, her head lying against Mary Beaton's knee, her hand clasped close in Jim Beaton's great palm, she told them the story of Alfred and her mother from the time they disappeared from Bentwell. When she came to that part of the story beginning with the night at the opera,

and what followed, Jim Beaton reached down and lifted her slender, quivering form up to the old settee and held her close clasped to him.

When she told them who Alfred was and where they had taken him, he could not repress a groan. Mary Beaton sat stunned and speechless, her heart slowly breaking, as her soul agonized for the child of her heart, now more lost to her than before, and upon whose head the storms of life were beating with greater fierceness and malignity.

Life at the old Beaton home flowed on in its calm, tranquil way. Margaret very quietly and easily slipped into its calm and gentle course, and gradually began to recover her usual buoyant spirits; while her happy laugh had ceased, her cheerful disposition began to assert itself, so that she soon became like a sweet smelling odor, a delicious influence, and a happy presence.

One day, while sitting with Mrs. Beaton in the sitting-room, the latter said, "Tell me, Margaret, who was this John of Ainhault, that you spoke of? What was he to Alfred that he should be chosen for such an important errand? For I take it from what you said that he was somehow in charge." At the mention of that name, Margaret Raymond felt a warm glow steal up over her fair face, and the older woman, who was looking toward her, saw that flush and wondered.

"As I understand it," said Margaret in reply, "John of Ainhault is the only son of the Emperor's dead brother, the Archduke John."

"Then this John of Ainhault is an own cousin of Alfred?"

"Yes."

"Are there any others?"

"No; for John of Ainhault is an only child of his parents, and Walther's son, whom he tried to place upon the throne, was also an only son."

"So that in case of anything happening to Alfred, this John of Ainhault would be next in line for the succession to the throne," said Mrs. Beaton.

"Yes," said Margaret. "But what could happen?"

"Oh, I don't know; I was only wondering."

"But," persisted Margaret, "I know that nothing will happen, for he, John of Ainhault, promised me that he would hold himself accountable for Alfred's safety; and I know that I can trust him."

Mary Beaton changed the subject and soon the matter seemed to have been forgotten, but she pondered it long and silently later.

A few days later Margaret took her way adown the great meadow and crossing the rail fence, wandered slowly up along the little singing brook, beside which Alfred had gone so often in the days gone by.

The winding way through the woods was easily followed from the natural opening of the trees, so that walking through the rustling leaves, she soon came out upon the south side. Coming near the barn she stopped, but seeing no one, she passed by and made her way out to the main road beyond the house.

Long and earnestly she looked, but no recollection came to her of her childhood days, she had been too young to remember aught of them.

In company with Jim and Mary Beaton she went to

the church at Bentwell, and then Mary Beaton told her the story of the great festival and Alfred.

Thus many happy as well as tender memories were recalled, each relating something of the past that was most dear to all, and in this way Margaret came to a deeper and fuller knowledge of the mother who had gone on, and of the brother from whom she seemed now more irrevocably separated than she had been before. And Jim and Mary Beaton, living over the old, sweet life again, came to love this gentle, beautiful girl, with a love second only to that they had given to him, the son of their hearts; for what mattered it to them that he was the son of the mightiest ruler in all Europe; he was the child God had sent them, and as such they loved and cherished his memory, and for the son of their love they prayed that God would guide and sustain him through the bitter trial to which He had called him, and give him victory at the last.

CHAPTER XVI

In the bright light of the early morning, Alfred stood near the rail of the vessel, his grand gray eyes somber and heavy, looking out over the great expanse of sparkling blue water.

After Col. Miron had left him the night before, with his accustomed habit, he had prepared himself to retire. The early training he had received was now of wonderful benefit. Quietly and methodically he made his preparations for the night, and, at last switching off the light, he slowly sank to his knees, but no thoughts came to him; after a little he arose and laid himself upon the luxurious bed, but no sleep came to his overwrought body and mind.

As he lay there in a kind of cataleptic state, his whole life passed before him. The acute agony of him seemed stunned. Then before him came the wonderful words of Friend Nathan Arnold. "Dishonor not the mother who bore you, belie not the mother who reared you."

The mother who bore him. The mother who bore him. How those words came up before him now. "It was neither in sin or shame that she conceived you."

What must she have been like, this mother who bore him? Back came the answer, "The chosen instrument in the hands of God to do His Divine Will."

A great calm seemed to possess him. Then his thoughts moved forward. His father, the Emperor, and at that thought he turned cold. Did he not know, did not the whole world know what kind of creature he was? Had not the

whole world rung with the reports of his foul scandals? With the tales of his wretched cruelties? Aye, even with the vile treachery of him toward that beautiful Princess of the North, his Empress?

He, Alfred, born of such a father? Born of such a mother? Reared by such a —— yes, such a mother? Yes, he could see it now; God had given him Margaret Raymond for a mother to rear and train him, just as truly as He had given that wonderful Princess of the North to bear him.

Then he thought, with a pang, of his country, the country he was forced to forsake, her grandeur, her freedom, her equality, her nobility; for, was not every true son of hers a King and a Prince? Had he not learned it early, that wonderful saying, “free and equal?”

He was back again upon the plains of Arizona. It was night; and oh, such a night. Stars, millions of them, shedding that wonderful, soft, luminous light over all the velvety darkness beneath; and out in that soft darkness, he could hear the soft sobbing and moaning of the cattle; the fragrant odor of their breath; the smell of their clean, sleek bodies; in the soft luminous light he could see the ghostly gleam of their polished horns, as they tossed them fitfully in their restlessness. He could feel himself moving among them silent, watchful, alert, Golden Betty close at his elbow, or cropping the sweet grass close by; he could hear the rich, luscious tear of her strong teeth as she nipped the rich growth. He could see a dim, ghostly form approaching, another watcher, like himself; the word of greeting, the friendly spirit, the vast prairie; the spirit of the West, that wonderful spirit that lives nowhere else upon the earth.

Then the rounding season. All over his splendid body he felt those little prickery, shivery feelings, just as he felt them when mounted upon Golden Betty, his head bared, he had dashed into the work with a zest that would not be abated, with a courage that bore down all before it.

Then he thought of the land to which he journeyed; of its old, worn laws and customs; its dreary, threadbare rounds and forms; its empty titles and useless ceremonies; its heartless cruelties, and he who had been the freest of the free, the happiest of the happy, the gentlest and most loving of the loving, was going a prisoner, bound and chained to the inflexible iron wheel of destiny. Had he not already felt the galling of those chains? The journey had only just begun, and already they were about him on every hand to wait upon him and serve him, hand and foot; him who had been as free as the birds of the air; ready to fawn upon him, to kiss his hand, to flatter even while they bound the chains tighter and still more tight.

He had hoped and prayed that it was all a mistake, for there was the golden nightingale in his throat, now more beautiful and luscious than ever. And if it were not a mistake, then it would be hushed forever as would the song of the nightingale be hushed when snatched away from its native freedom and rudely thrust behind cruel iron bars.

Thus all through the night his thoughts ran on until with the early dawn he rose and passing into his bath, he hastily plunged into the cool, refreshing sea water.

Greatly refreshed and strengthened, he put on a light top-coat and took his way out upon the deck of the vessel. The dark circles, like bruises, still showed beneath those

beautiful, golden-gray eyes. The pallor still clung to his handsome face.

Looking out over the sparkling water, about a mile away to the right, he saw another vessel going in the same direction; watching it closely for a time he could see that it was of different pattern and build than the one upon which he was travelling; that she seemed to set down more closely upon the water; then he could make out the turrets and caught the glisten of the sunlight upon some polished surface; suddenly it came to him that it was a battleship. Then he remembered they had told him that there were two.

Where then was the other?

Slowly he turned and walked around to the opposite side of the vessel.

There, about a mile distant to the right, was another.

Again over him came that cold, deadly chill, and he shivered as with cold.

He felt stifled, choked. Where was his freedom? Was he never to know it again? For a moment his soul sickened; the change was too cruel, too great. He looked about. A steamer chair stood near by. He looked and saw his own name upon the card. Surprised, he looked at the next and saw the name of Col. Miron; he looked no further, but taking up the heavy rug he seated himself and covered himself with it. For a few minutes a feeling of helplessness came over him. He wanted to rest. He wanted to think.

Someone took the chair next to him. He neither turned nor moved. With heavy, unseeing eyes he looked out over the blue waves to the great iron-clad in the distance.

The sun now high risen, gleamed brightly upon polished steel and brass which sparkled in its rays, and often

showed plainly to the eye as she ploughed her way through watery hill and valley.

Many and varied were the conjectures as to who and what those strange vessels were moving so silently and yet so steadily forward with them. A spirit of suppressed excitement was abroad. But no one associated the white, haggard-faced man, with the tired, hurt eyes of a child, with the strange ships.

The waiter brought him a cup of bouillon. He was an old colored man, the same who had served him in his private suite; he was a dear faithful old darkey; he hovered over him as over a sick child, he cajoled him, he wheedled him, he scolded him, he fed him, he soothed him; truly hath God used the weak ones of the earth to confound the strong. He leaned down over him as gently as a mother over her child. The old gray head and the young golden-brown one almost touched. The old, wrinkled, black face, and the young, handsome white one for a moment rested side by side, a startling picture of age encouraging youth, weakness assisting strength.

The old man was talking, crooning in his soft southern dialect.

Col. Miron heard, and a grim look of relief went over his grizzled features.

John of Ainhault heard, and his eyelids smarted as a sad smile flitted across his fine face.

"Bress yo' chile, doan' yo' go a settin' yeah all day. Yo' jes' wan' a get up an' go a walkin' aroun', jes' a walkin' aroun'. Come, suh," and the old darkey leaned down and putting his slim old arms around the splendid young shoul-

ders, he fairly lifted him from his seat. "Uncle Jaspah done help yo', suh."

Just at that moment the ship gave a lurch which partly threw them from their balance; quick as a flash, Alfred flung himself upright, and catching the frail old hands of the old darkey in his strong young ones he held him firmly upright, for a moment the dim old eyes looked with all the fidelity and affection of a dog into those splendid orbs above him, and Alfred Raymond looking down and seeing that look, a smile, like a moonbeam across the snow, flitted over his handsome face.

As he held those old, bony, misshapen hands in his splendid strong, white ones, he said, "Thank you, Uncle, but you mustn't mind me so much."

"Dass all right, chile, dass all right," said the old man quickly, "but yo' Uncle Jaspah jes' see yo' ain't a feelin' yoself, suh, an' yo' Uncle Jaspah done see jes' wot yo' requiah', so yo' jes' keep a walkin' aroun'," pushing him gently by the shoulder, "doan' yo' go a settin' down," following him as he moved away, "jes' yo' keep a walkin' aroun', keep a walkin' aroun'; w'en yo' lunch's re'dy, ah'll come foh' yo', yes suh, ah'll come foh' yo'."

Alfred moved slowly away, hearing the old, crooning voice as he went and a soft smile played about his handsome mouth, softening the rigid lines that had begun to show there, while a tender, luminous light began to glow from his splendid eyes.

The old darkey turned back and began to fold up the great rug, turning at times to note whether his charge was obeying his command and was keeping "walking roun', jes a walkin' roun'." Laying it down, he stooped and lifted up

the tray he had brought, and there lay a bright, new, shining silver dollar. "Now wha' dat dollah kum frum," said he.

"Better keep it, Uncle," said John of Ainhault, "I saw him lay it down." As he said it John of Ainhault made the sign of the cross and I know the recording angel was kind that day and did not lay that sin to his charge.

"Great people those Southerners," said the man on his right who had been an interested spectator to the scene. "Greatest people in the world," repeated he without waiting for a reply. "And those colored people, most peculiar thing I ever saw, no matter how much grown up their masters become, in their eyes they never are anything but the little babes they have tended and cared for, and loved; yes, great people, can see it for yourself; this fellow, evidently just recovering from some illness, and that old darkey just hovering and domineering over him like an old mammy over her baby."

John of Ainhault nodded, but vouchsafed no reply, and let the conversation drift off upon other topics. Thus it was that the impression was formed that Alfred, in company with his old colored servant, was travelling for his health.

At the lunch hour the old colored man found him leaning over the rail, looking back in the wake of the vessel, and going up to him he touched him lightly upon the arm, as he said, "Yo' lunch's all ready foh yo' suh, yo'll done come now? En Uncle Jaspah'll suhve yo', yes, suh, Uncle Jaspah'll done suhve yo' fin' suh."

Alfred turned, a half smile upon his face, toward the old man.

"Well, Uncle, I'm afraid you'll find me lots of trouble,"

he said as he placed his hand upon the old, bent shoulder, and moved off with him toward the salon.

“Ah, no, suh!” said the old man eagerly. “But ah done see whaffo’ you’all bin a wantin’, you’all bin jis’ a little heaht-sick, yes, suh, jes a little heaht-sick, das all, das all, en Uncle Jaspah kno’ jes waffo to do.”

So the icy strain being broken, he moved off with the old colored man who could no more help pouring out the sweetness of his simple old heart, than the blossom can help shedding its fragrance upon the parched air.

After the luncheon hour, which he spent in his own apartments, Alfred spent some time wandering about the ship. During one of his rambles he encountered John of Ainhault, and accosting him he asked him if he would find Col. Miron and bring him to his suite. His request being granted, he made one or two more turns and then proceeded to meet them as appointed.

The afternoon was spent discussing the country and situation of the same, to which he was journeying; he did not question much, his method being to induce them to discuss; he, by well chosen remarks, succeeding in keeping the discussion well in hand and in this way he was able to learn many more points than he would have, had he resorted to questioning, for John of Ainhault and Col. Miron did not always agree, but with great tact Alfred kept the discussion along the plane he wished.

At other times he invited Admiral Sefton with one or the other; at others, Sir Isaac Davis; so he varied his arrangements; sometimes he met three of them, then again all four, at other times singly.

The reason for this was that he knew he was going

among a people who were strangers to him, almost, it seemed aliens, and his theory was that there was nothing, either simple or great, that would not be useful; one of the principles of his life being expressed in the saying that, there was nothing so mean or small, but that he could learn something from it; knowing full well that knowledge and wisdom had never yet injured any man, while the lack of it had cost many a man dear.

One day while standing near the forward rail, watching the great iron-clad in the distance, which he had begun to accept with less irritation, the captain came near and stopped to speak with him, and while talking the leader of the orchestra came up and asked to speak; the captain excused himself and turning to the man said, "What is it Maroni?"

"You know, sir," replied the man, "that we are to give the concert to-night for the benefit of the Sailors' Widows and Orphans Home?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Well!" said Maroni, excitedly, "we cannot give it!"

"Cannot give it!" echoed the captain. "Why?"

"Madame Metroski, who had agreed to sing the *Inflammatus* for us, has refused to sing, nor will she give any reason for not doing it, and as that was the best number on the programme, you can see in what an awkward position it leaves us."

A look of disgust passed over the captain's face.

"D — n those singers, anyway!" said the captain. "I beg your pardon, sir," said he turning to Alfred, "but you see you not being interested in such things, you will pardon me if I say that you can scarcely appreciate the position we

often find ourselves placed in at times; and singers are about the most uncertain quantity I have ever yet met. Yes, sir," continued he, "they are more uncertain than the old Atlantic herself."

Alfred smiled, but offered no reply.

"Well, Maroni," continued the captain, "what will you do? D——n it! Haven't I always told you not to put all your eggs in one basket? Are the programmes out yet?"

"They are in the hands of the printer now," was the reply.

"And is there nothing you can substitute? No one else who can do it?"

Maroni shook his head.

"Is there nothing you can put in the place of it? You see," said he, turning to Alfred who had remained an interested listener and giving Maroni a chance to think, "we usually give one good concert on the trip, and charge a pretty stiff price, the proceeds going to the Home for Sailors' Widows and Orphans, and as we have done pretty well, why, naturally we wish to keep up our reputation, aside from the awkward position it places us in before the passengers, as nearly the entire seating capacity of the grand salon has already been sold. Well, Maroni, we'll have to call it off and refund the money, and put the best face upon it we can, so I guess you'd better start now."

Maroni started away to do as he was bidden.

"Captain James," said Alfred, "tell your man to wait for a few moments."

Surprised, the captain called to Maroni and asked him

to remain, then he turned to Alfred, a questioning look upon his face.

"Will you walk back a little with me, captain?" said Alfred.

They retired to a more remote part of the deck. Alfred then turned to the captain, and said, "Captain James, tell your man to go on with his programme as if nothing had occurred, only leave the space allotted the name of Madame Metroski blank; tell him to proceed with the rendering of the programme just as he had planned; there will be someone ready to give the *Inflammatus* at the required time."

Captain James was looking into that handsome face, and into those wonderful eyes, that seemed to be compelling him to do their bidding.

As if impelled by some unseen power, he called Maroni, and delivered the message to the wondering man.

After he had departed Alfred continued, "You know I am occupying Suite A." Captain James bowed, speechless. "Have a screen, a white one if you can get it, set up before my door so that it will not attract attention; after the solo it can be removed. You will do this?"

It was a question, yet Captain James knew it was a command that he could not refuse.

"Also you will discuss the matter with no one?"

Another question, yet the thought of refusing to comply never occurred to him. Then he saluted, and bowed low as Alfred passed on.

Bewildered, he returned to his office and gave the necessary orders for the concert.

Now that he was removed from the influence of those wonderful eyes, and that compelling presence, he began to

be assailed by curious doubts. "Who was this man? What could he do? How could he assure success where failure threatened?"

He sent for the purser.

When the latter came he asked, "Who is travelling in Suite A?"

"A man by the name of Alfred Raymond; a Southerner, I believe," was the reply.

"Anyone with him?"

"No, only an old colored man."

"Know anything about him?"

"No, only it seems that he was not very well when he came aboard, and come to think, the suite that he is occupying was taken for that foreign party, and he immediately dismissed all of their attendants, and the only one he will allow to come near him to wait upon him, is that old Southern darkey, Jasper, I think they call him. At a few times, I believe he has spoken with them upon deck; and I have been told that a few times, one or two of them have been in his apartments with him, but from what I can learn, their conversation has been chiefly concerned with the discussion of different nations and their policies, mostly from an impersonal point of view."

"Nothing strange or seditious in that," said the captain.

"No," said the purser, "the only odd thing is, that at times he seems to prefer to be left alone, and at such times, the old darkey seems to be the only one who can handle him, for none of the others attempt even to speak to him."

"Odd, don't you think so?" said the captain.

"Well, yes," replied the purser, "for at such times I have seen him sitting for hours in his chair, well wrapped

up by the old darkey, his eyes straight ahead, the saddest look I have ever seen upon his face, and never move until the old man will come around and force him to go, as he says, 'walkin' 'roun', jes' walkin' roun'.' "

" You don't think he's crooked in the head? " said the captain anxiously.

" No," was the reply, " but if I were going to offer an opinion, I would say that he strikes me as being a man who had sustained some terrifically painful shock, and for the time being, seems to have lost his bearings; and, while we may scoff at the idea, the old darkey, possessed of the peculiarly fine intuition of his race, seems to have been the only one who has had the power and ability to get down to the root of the matter; or, at least, near enough to it, so that he, in his poor, weak way, has been able to afford the relief that wiser and stronger ones have been unable to supply. For, as the old man was heard to say to him, he seems to be, 'a little heaht sick, jes a little heaht-sick.' "

" Then you think the man is all right? " It sounded like an assertion, but underneath lay a question.

" Yes," said the purser. " Of course, to many, his actions would seem strange, but, even though I know actually nothing, yet I find nothing to arouse any question in my mind; as for the party, they have done nothing to excite any undue attention for one so large."

" For one so large? " said the captain. " Why, how large a party is it? "

" Between forty and fifty people," was the reply.

" So many as that? "

" Yes."

" And their bills? "

"Were all promptly paid when they came aboard, and while they make no lavish display of money, they seem to have plenty, for they stint themselves in nothing, and always settle at once."

"H'm," said the captain. "Well, Mr. Jackson, I will tell you why I sent for you; Maroni tells me that Madame Metroski has refused to go on with her part of the programme to-night, and ——"

"Refused! what the ——! I beg your pardon, sir," said the purser.

"Oh, that's all right, Mr. Jackson," said the captain, "swear if you want to, I imagine we would both feel relieved if we could get it out of our systems, and yet, it would not be the proper thing for you to indulge in any profane language, especially in the presence of your superior officer," said the captain, a merry twinkle in his eyes.

"But, sir," persisted the purser, "what will we do?"

"That is what I wish to tell you, and why I have questioned you so closely about this man in Suite A. You see he was present when Maroni brought me word and heard the whole conversation. As I sent Maroni away to cancel the whole thing, he desired him to wait; then he said to me, 'Captain James, go on with your arrangements as if nothing had occurred; only leave the space allotted to Madame Metroski's name a blank; and tell Maroni to go on with his programme, there will be some one provided for the great solo when the time comes.' Those are his words as nearly as I can recall them."

"Captain! What do you suppose he means? Wait," said the purser excitedly putting his hand to his brow. "Alfred Raymond," mused he to himself, "Alfred Raymond."

Where have I heard that name? Let m—e t—h—i—n—k, A—l—f—r—e—d R—a—y—m—o—n—d. Ah! I have it!" said he, bristling with excitement. "I just recall it."

"Recall what?" said Captain James much impressed by the excitement of the purser.

"The story of Alfred Raymond. What you have just told me has reminded me. It seems that Burgmuller, at the Grand Opera House, had some trouble with DelMere over Schelmendauer. She had refused to go on with him. It seems that the last time he appeared with her, he was disgustingly drunk, got so purposely to annoy her, for he was jealous of her popularity with the public; and being too cowardly to come out in the open, he took that method of putting her to a disadvantage; so, when she blocked his appearing in Faust with her, Burgmuller was, as the boys say, 'up against it'; well to make a long story short, he dug this man Alfred Raymond up from somewhere, Heaven knows where, and the man did a most unheard-of thing, sang, the people said, 'like an Archangel.'"

"Are you sure that this is the same man?" said the captain anxiously.

"Wouldn't his manner assure you?" said the purser. "Who but Alfred Raymond could give such an order?"

"Why is it, do you suppose," said the captain, "that Maroni knows nothing of him?"

"Oh, Maroni never sees an inch beyond his nose when he's on shore," said the purser, "gets in among his own kind and never gets out and around where he ought to."

"But why do you suppose he is off here on this trip? Wouldn't you think that if he were able to do as well as

you say he did, that Burgmuller would have kept him on the job? I know Burgmuller, and he was never known to let anything real good slip through his fingers."

"That explains the whole thing," interrupted the purser. "I remember making a remark similar to yours, and was told that his mother dropped dead from some great shock the day after that performance. Ah! That explains the man's dejection. Captain," said he, leaning eagerly forward, "if the man's anything like as good as they say he is ——"

"We'll teach Madame Metroski a lesson she won't forget in a hurry," said the captain with equal eagerness. "Now, Mr. Jackson, not a word, but if you hear anything, just insinuate that we have a trump card up our sleeve. Excite all the curiosity you can if anyone broaches the subject to you; but don't you be the one to do much or the first talking. Look wise, and confident, and I am sure that we can checkmate any act on the part of Metroski. Above all, do not mention anything of what we have been discussing, and particularly do not mention a name; get on to the mysterious side, and the imagination of the people, together with their curiosity, will do the rest. Raymond, as you call him, has asked for a screen to be placed in front of his door. Get one as near the style of the decoration of the great salon, white and gold, as you can. By Jove!" Said the captain, bringing his fist down upon his desk with a resounding blow; "there's the whole thing in a nutshell. Raymond himself is going to sing, he does not wish to be seen or known; so he will sing from behind the screen. Good! That's the best yet! Now, Mr. Jackson, you look out for the screen and your part, and I'll look after Maroni,

for 'twould be just like him to flunk unless he could see his singer right before his face and eyes. Well, for once he will have to trust to luck, even though he has asserted so often, that he 'will trust nothing he does not actually see and feel.'"

Whereupon the purser made his way back to his office while the captain sent for Maroni.

"Maroni," said he, "when you come to the great solo to-night, I want you to take up the work without any hesitation whatever; and another thing," said he, silencing the man's objections with a gesture, "I want you to play it as you never played it before, for you will have such a soloist as you have never yet had." Then as he ushered him out, and speaking loud enough to be heard by some passengers who were passing, "Metroski may have a bad case of indisposition," oh, the sarcasm expressed in that one word, "but we can't wait for such cases when we have one of the greatest voices that the world has ever heard, right with us. So, as I have said, do your best to-night, or you will find yourself looking for another job, and with no recommendation to do it with either." So, eager as a school-boy, Captain James bundled Maroni out of his sight and hearing.

The captain's little speech had had its effect. Word had circulated through the great ship that Metroski would not sing. Considerable dissatisfaction was being expressed. But, said rumor, Captain James has someone else, better still; I heard him say it. And listen, even Maroni does not know; Maroni must play without even seeing his singer. Think of it. The terrible Maroni who has humbled many a great artist. Maroni who prides himself on being master of the finest orchestra on board ship anywhere in the world.

And so the rumor ran.

"Is it so, Mr. Jackson?" But the purser only smiled knowingly, and remarked, "Oh, the people will not lose by the exchange." Or, "Oh, Captain James has many things good, bad and indifferent stowed away on board ship, and when had Captain James offered them anything but that which was good?"

John of Ainhault and Alfred were sitting out upon the deck, well wrapped against the cool October winds.

He had heard the rumors, and recalling the story of Burgmuller, his suspicions were aroused. Several times he turned his face toward the silent form near him, but there was that in that silent, impassive face and still form that forbade any interrogation whatever; so John of Ainhault determined to be present at the evening performance.

To say that he was greatly puzzled, would be putting it mildly. He had expected to find in that land he had been led to believe was inhabited only by uncouth people and barbarians, a man brought up in only at best, such primitive conditions as to be, quite necessarily, a rough, uncouth, and ill-bred fellow; but instead, he had found a man of such exquisite refinement and breeding as made him the peer of any man he, the Archduke, had ever met. A man with a personality so great that no man dared to pass the line of exclusion with which he sometimes surrounded himself. And John of Ainhault was sore troubled, for he knew what lay before. He would gladly have explained to him the terrible disposition of the Emperor, his father; for John of Ainhault accepted him fully as the Crown Prince and his cousin; but Alfred forbade any reference to that subject, whatever; and no man dreamed of the

knowledge on that point he already possessed, and when he spoke with that tone of finality, no man dared to disobey.

The hour for the evening concert had arrived. The great salon was filled to its utmost capacity.

Captain James was seated near to Maroni and the orchestra, near to a little wall cabinet which he had quietly unlocked. The purser was stationed at the door, taking tickets.

John of Ainhault and his party took the seats reserved for them. One seat, Captain James noticed, was empty. Alfred Raymond was not present.

Madame Metroski, closely veiled, was seated in the shadow of a pillar, not far from the door. The purser had recognized her.

She had heard the rumors, and, burning with curiosity and pique, she had sent her maid, whom the purser had recognized, to secure the seat for her.

The purser smiled grimly as she entered.

The expectant excitement was intense.

The programme began.

Maroni was a master. Every man under him was an artist; and the work of every man, whether singly or ensemble, was mechanically perfect, but a perfection that lacked soul; it was the perfection of a fine instrument.

The applause was generous, but the people were waiting, waiting.

No one had noticed the screen placed in front of the door of Suite A.

A lock clicked. The sharp click of it smote the intense silence almost painfully.

Captain James opened the door of the little wall cabinet and signalled the motion of the great screw diminished, the ship ceased to tremble and vibrate, she seemed to become motionless.

He looked toward Maroni and sat down.

Harsh, strident, compelling, the opening notes of the great composition pealed through the great room, causing that crowd of waiting, expectant people to thrill and grow cold. What was coming? What would it be like?

Metroski bent eagerly forward, her hands clenched until the nails almost cut the soft flesh of the palms, her breath coming and going in little short gasps.

A cold perspiration broke out all over Maroni; suppose the promised singer should fail; suppose there were no singer at all; how would he ever be able to hold up his head again? It was the greatest test of his life.

Captain James had grown visibly paler.

John of Ainhault waited, calmly confident, longing, yet dreading to hear that glorious voice again.

Alfred, standing behind the screen, heard those fierce, strident notes. He saw the beautiful new church of his boyhood days. The great viol was sinking down, down through those splendid cadences, and he saw the little sister Margaret stretch out her dear little baby hand to him. He saw his mother and the little baby sister. Now he heard those peculiar, fluttering notes. His throat ached, ached; his chest throbbed, throbbed; they were coming nearer, nearer; he turned to meet them; now they were all about him.

“To Thy holy, to Thy holy care elected.”

Maroni almost stopped; blindly he continued.

Metroski sank back, almost fainting.

Out over that eager, expectant throng floated a voice of such unearthly beauty, that the heart almost ceased to beat. The great salon and all it contained faded from view. What they now saw was a vast, dim cathedral; dim but for the lights upon the altar. In that dim, religious light they saw a man's form kneeling with outstretched arms and upturned face upon which the soft, subdued light shone dimly. The eyes were closed; the face was white with agony; the agony of that mighty appeal.

The voice ceased; the head dropped; the music was going on; then the face was lifted again;

“Thro’ the loved Redeemer’s dying,”

Alfred Raymond was praying, and almost, methinks, that prayer must have gone to the foot of the throne of God itself.

But hark! What was that?

A woman's voice was answering. A woman's voice, freighted with agony, shame and remorse.

“Let me fondly still relying,”

The beauty of the voice was indescribable.

“Let me fondly still relying,” came the sobbing tones of the woman. Metroski was singing the response; the effect was startling. Metroski's pride had been laid in the dust; she was eating her camphor with her myrrh.

The great solo was ended. A low moan went up from that assembly of people. Alfred Raymond had prayed his

prayer. That incomparable voice hushed; yes, hushed for ever.

A death-like silence hung over that great company. Maroni lifted his baton to give the signal for the last number. A woman's voice called, "Oh, please, please!" A door clicked. Captain James held up his hand; Maroni lowered his baton. The great screw moved. The great ship thrilled. The concert was ended and John Ainhault knew that Alfred Raymond in praying that prayer had sung for the last time.

During the next afternoon, Alfred asked John of Ainhault, with Col. Miron and Admiral Sefton, to meet him in his salon.

After they had assembled he asked John of Ainhault how long it would be before they would arrive at their destination.

"In about three days," was the reply.

"Have you sent any message ahead?" asked he.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Admiral Sefton," said he, "can you communicate with your ships?"

"Yes, sir," was the respectful reply.

The three were watching him with wondering eyes.

"Then I wish you to have them each to send a cutter alongside at a time when they would be likely to attract the least notice. John of Ainhault, I would like to have you to divide your entire company in two parts, neither to know who is in the other. Admiral Sefton will take one party with him, and you will take the other with you. Col. Miron will remain with me. You can easily see how that each party will think that I am with the other."

“But, your——”

Alfred held up his hand.

“But, sir,” remonstrated Col. Miron, “His Majesty, the Emperor, has commanded that we bring you with all the dignity due your rank as Crown Prince.”

A dark flush stained the pale cheek of the young man. His head was held haughtily erect as he answered coldly, “The wishes of the Emperor would carry more weight; his orders are nothing to me. You will do as I ask. I will arrange with you, Col. Miron, regarding my own movements.” Then seeing the looks of doubt upon their faces, he added, “I am not yet satisfied that I am the son of your Emperor, and until I am fully satisfied, I must be allowed to have my own way; have no fear, I will meet your Emperor. I have nothing to fear.”

The face of John Ainhault was ghastly white as he left the room. What did he see? What did it portend?

In the dim light of the early morning, Alfred Raymond and John of Ainhault stood upon the deck of the great ship. The face of the young Archduke was drawn and white, the other's, dark and somber; a moment they stood with hands clasped, then, “until we meet in Carodina,” a few minutes later and the Archduke was gone with his party and Alfred stood alone back from the rail, Col. Miron standing at rigid attention in the background.

Shortly after midnight of the day before, a cutter had put out from the liner, carrying Admiral Sefton, Sir Isaac Davis and their company.

The blue waters of the Atlantic sparkled in the chill October sunlight. The great ship forged ahead. In the

distance the two great battleships kept grim, silent watch on their steady march.

Within, Alfred and Col. Miron remained closeted for some time, making their final preparations.

Three days later the great vessel warped into her slip in the magnificent city of Carodina.

Col. Miron walked slowly down the gang-plank to the dock and met John of Ainhault with Admiral Sefton; he saluted. "You are to proceed to the Imperial residence with your party by way of the Avenue Meuneur, to the principal entrance; in the confusion we will slip away and go by King street to the private entrance on the north."

So quickly and so well were the instructions carried out, that in plain sight of the waiting throng, while the great cavalcade swept away from the dock toward the avenue, they scarcely saw a closed carriage, containing a strangely assorted trio, Col. Miron, grim and gristly, a feeble colored man, decrepit and old, and a young man with a pale, beautiful face with grand golden-gray eyes, as it rolled away before their very eyes, and took its way toward King street.

CHAPTER XVII

Up the broad avenue swept the cavalcade, headed by John of Ainhault. A great crowd had gathered along the way to catch a first glimpse of the Crown Prince; the Emperor's own son.

The story had travelled from mouth to mouth; no amount of threats could suppress it; even the press under veiled headings had gone as far as it had dared, to the end that the Imperial city of Carodina was seething from centre to circumference with a mighty interest.

On they galloped.

"But how strangely they ride!"

"Why do they changes places so often?"

"They change places so often that it is hard to recognize even those who are well known."

"Did you see him?"

"Who?"

"Why, the Crown Prince, stupid! Who else is there to see?"

"No, did you?"

"Did he ride with John of Ainhault?" said a third.

"John of Ainhault!" said the first speaker. "Where was he?"

"Why, at the head!" Did you not see him riding alone?"

"Big Welter says, he wots he will come dressed in a blanket and wearing feathers in his hair, like — oh, like —" said the first speaker.

"Oh, you mean like an Indian."

"Yes, that's it; they say they are all half wild men over there."

"Go too, you, Big Welter has made a fool of you."

"Go to yourself."

And so the words ran; not always friendly, not always threatening; yet, when the company had passed, no man could say that he had seen aught of the Emperor's son.

In the meantime the closed carriage containing Alfred, Col. Miron and the old colored man was being driven rapidly along a quiet side street to the north entrance of the Imperial Palace, and, as the mounted company swept up to the main entrance with much noise and confusion, drew up before a small, inconspicuous private entrance.

Ushering Alfred into a small ante-room, Col. Miron sought the groom of the household to ascertain which suite had been allotted to the use of the new Crown Prince, and it was with considerable emotion and feeling that he learned that he was to occupy the Empress' own suite.

Then under cover of the confusion of the party at the main entrance which had drawn the attention of the entire household thither, he conducted Alfred to the spacious apartments prepared for him.

As Alfred passed into the room he stopped, a look of wonder upon his face. The ceilings were lofty and decorated with pale pink, satiny roses; the walls were panelled with pale pink satin, while the feet literally sunk in a carpet of magnificent pink roses. All the furnishings were in pink satin and white, while the great windows were draped with rarest lace over heavy white shades with broad gold bands, which threw a soft, subdued light over all the great room.

Opposite to the main entrance to the salon, stood a great mirror, the frame of which, reaching from floor to ceiling, was of pure gold. Upon either side of it, hanging in straight, yet graceful folds, were heavy satin portieres of the same color and shade as the panelled walls. Every article in the room was of the rarest pattern, and most exquisite workmanship.

Through a large doorway he could see a somewhat smaller room, the furnishings and decorations of pale green. The combination of the coloring and furnishings of the two rooms was wonderful. He stepped into the doorway, and through another doorway he could catch a glimpse of a royally equipped bed chamber, done in pale ivory white.

He turned to Col. Miron, who was observing him closely.

"These rooms, Col. Miron?" questioned he.

"Were the private rooms of the Empress, **your** mother," was the low spoken reply.

"The Empress, my mother?" repeated he.

"Yes, Your Highness."

"And why these?"

"The Emperor ordered it."

For a moment Alfred remained silent, then he spoke. "Are there rooms near for him?" indicating the old colored man, who had remained standing near the entrance to the salon.

"There are the rooms allotted to the Empress' personal attendants, which have been refitted for the attendants appointed to serve you," was the reply.

"Have them and their belongings removed at once,

and give the rooms to Jasper ; he is the only one I shall wish near me. You will do this for me?"

Col. Miron bowed, and left the room with the colored man, and Alfred was left alone.

For a moment he remained in deep thought. His mother, the Empress. What if it should be true after all, and he were the son of the Emperor? No, it was not true. It could not be true. He tried to shake off the feeling of oppression that weighed him down. He thought of the Emperor. That man his father? No! No! A thousand times no!

Man? He was not a man! He was a monster! Did he not know the story of his life? A life so black and foul that all the world had shuddered at the mere mention of it. Had not all the world known of his bestiality, and the sad, sad tale of the beautiful young Empress? For deeds not half so vile as that, men had been hanged; and yet, because he was an Emperor, the world had cringed, and fawned upon him like a beaten hound.

No! No! He was not the son of that creature, he could not call him a man; he would see him: yes, see him for himself, and prove to them that they had made a mistake. He knew it was a mistake, but he would pardon them, he would not lay it up against them.

Upon an exquisitely wrought gold table, with priceless onyx top, near by, lay a little ivory covered prayer-book; it had been the Empress'; he took it up. The leaves fell apart; the book opened in his hand.

"Out of the deep have I called unto Thee. Lord, hear my voice."

"Oh, let Thine ears consider well, the voice of my complaint."

He read no further. An awful chill seemed to enfold him. What if it should all be true? He felt that he was suffocating. He wanted air, air. He went to one of the great windows, and flinging aside the rich lace hangings, he tore open the great casement and stepped out upon the stone balcony below.

The sun was sinking in the west. The Imperial city was bathed in a rich golden glow. The waves in the harbor rippled and sparkled in that beautiful, golden light. It was a scene of surpassing beauty and splendor, but he saw it not. It woke no feeling of pride or elation in him.

He had lived in a land of unrestrained freedom; it had been in all around him; in the very air he had breathed. It was a part of himself; it was life itself.

There all had been light and brightness; here all was gloom, oppression, heaviness. There all had been life and vitality; here all seemed to him to be decay and death. There all had been a glorious advance; here all was stagnation. There man had looked into the face of his fellow-man without fear or shame; here was all marred by the great blot of servility. Servility that bowed and fawned upon favoritism; and it oppressed him, it wearied him.

The sun slowly sank behind the distant hills. The shadows of night crept on. Still he lingered.

Within there was only a slight sound. The old colored man moving about, arranging his belongings. There was a low crooning sound. The old man was singing; little snatches of half-forgotten melodies; old bits of lullabys that had been crooned over the old cradle that had rocked

his own baby form, by the old "mammy" who had "gone home to Glory" years and years ago. Little wild bursts of melody in that wondrous, peculiar tone that had in it the dank smell of the hot wild-wood; of deep shades; of black waters and mystic shapes; of untutored wildness, followed by decades of soul-breaking slavery.

Alfred found his wandering thoughts arrested and held. Then he began to follow and to understand. This old black man; he had been free, free; then had come the white man, and had bound him and carried him away to a strange land. Those splendid ebony limbs and arms that had never known restraint; they had loaded them with iron shackles, until the iron had cut deep into the shrinking flesh, cut to the very bone itself where the scars would never be obliterated; cut until the poison had gone to his very soul; until every bit of pride, of manhood, had died, never to be restored.

So they had come upon him, Alfred Raymond. They had thrown their deadly nets about him; they had bound him body and soul, and had brought him an unwilling captive to a strange land.

"Ah's de chile ub a King,
De chile ub a King."

The old wavering voice was coming nearer, nearer; it was at the casement. "Yo dinnah's suhved, suh; you 'll done come now?"

Like a child he came, that little refrain of the old colored man sounding so strange in this place.

Later on he passed into the magnificent sleeping room. He contemplated the great silken bed, and recalling the

words of Col. Miron, "the private apartments of the Empress, your mother," he called the old colored man and directed that a simple cot be placed at the foot of the great bed for his use.

Later they brought him word that the Emporer would see him in the great throne room.

Then, like a lonely wearied child, he laid his splendid form upon the simple soldier's bed at the foot of the great silken couch that had been his birthplace, as it had been the bier of his sainted mother, and slept his first sleep beneath the roof of his father's house; the strange weird refrain of the old black man, "Ah's de chile ub a King, de chile ub a King," sounding so strange in this magnificently luxurious place.

Simultaneously with the arrival of Alfred and his party at the small private entrance, was the arrival of John of Ainhault and his party at the main entrance to the palace; who, having been preceded by a messenger, requested an audience with the Emperor, and was at once conducted thither.

Upon being admitted to the Emperor's apartments, he found him in a greatly excited condition.

"Well?" said the latter harshly.

It was both a question and a command.

The pale, cold features of John of Ainhault flushed slightly at the savage remark, and though accustomed to the despotic disposition of his uncle, the Emporer, he now found himself unconsciously arraying himself upon the side of his new-found and ill-fated cousin, the Crown Prince,

as he replied coldly, "My messenger informed you of the success of our journey, and also advised you that we were bringing His Highness, the Crown Prince, with us?"

The Emperor bowed, but offered no remark.

"He has been conducted to the apartments of the late Empress, his mother, as your Majesty ordered. Miron is with him," continued the Archduke.

"Miron!" exclaimed the Emperor. "And where are Vladimir, Auerlo, and the rest of that horde? Are they not there also?"

"No, they were waiting in the great hall to meet him, but as he declined to travel in our company, they did not see him, and are, therefore, in considerable uncertainty concerning him," was the reply.

"Declined to travel in your company?" exclaimed the Emperor. "Miron is with him? Why is that?"

"He is not yet fully convinced that he is your son, and until he is he has refused to assume any of the prerogatives of such a position," replied the young Archduke.

"Oh," sneered the Emperor. "Rather high and mighty for the young upstart! I expect that you will tell me next that he has refused to travel in the manner befitting his position, as I had commanded."

"He did," replied John of Ainhault coldly.

"What?" almost shouted the Emperor.

The Archduke hastened to reply, "As I said, he is not yet fully convinced that he is other than Alfred Raymond and therefore has declined to assume any liberties, even those that were accorded him. He absolutely refused to travel upon Your Majesty's vessels —" The Emperor made

as if he would interrupt, but the speaker went on, "and came instead upon the great liner, the Empress Charlotte. When he came on board the vessel in New York harbor, he dismissed all of Your Majesty's attendants and was waited upon by an old colored man whom he picked up on board the ship."

"Dismissed, well, by the—!" ejaculated the Emperor, quivering with rage, but the other interrupted him again, and he found himself compelled to listen, for some subtle change had gone over John of Ainhault. When had any of his subjects or family dared to interrupt him before? The thought caused him greater irritation, but he of Ainhault was speaking, "and while on board the vessel, he allowed Your Majesty's party to approach him only when it pleased him."

John of Ainhault seemed to find considerable enjoyment in relating the circumstances of the trip, minutely, and continued, "Shortly before we arrived in Carodina he directed that I take one part of the party and board one of Your Majesty's battleships, while Admiral Sefton take the remainder and board the other, himself and Col. Miron remaining on board the Empress Charlotte until she reached port."

"And you let that young whelp ——?" shouted the Emperor.

"I obeyed the commands of the Crown Prince, your son," was the hot reply, "and obeying his wishes," John of Ainhault spoke with stinging clearness, "I brought my company away, while he, with Col. Miron and his old attendant, slipped through the crowd without being seen by any one."

"Don't wish to be seen? Hey? Well I'll show him up! The boor! The lout! I'll ——!"

John of Ainhault flushed scarlet and made as if to reply, but the Emperor, now thoroughly infuriated, held up his hand and compelled him to be silent.

"Don't wish to be seen?" continued the Emperor, "Good! Good! I'll humble his impudence for him! I'll show him who is the Emperor!" Then suddenly breaking off he added, "to-morrow in the throne room, at three, I will see him."

The young Archduke looked startled.

"The Crown Prince's company will be there in full uniform, and you will be in command. Col. Miron will command the Imperial Guard. Admiral Sefton will command the Marines. We will show this young upstart who is master here. Send Miron to me."

John of Ainhault saluted and departed, and the Emperor was alone with his thoughts, and they stung him afresh. Again had he been defied, and by this son of hers, his beautiful, disdainful Empress. He was his son also and he would break him as he had broken Raoul, the supposed Crown Prince. Disobeyed his orders? He, the mightiest ruler in the whole world, whose slightest wish was law? He would show this young upstart that he could not intrude any of the lawlessness of that wild country he came from, here. He would ——

An attendant announced Col. Miron. "Admit him," said he gruffly.

Col. Miron entered and saluted.

"You came from him, Miron?" said the Emperor.

"I did, Your Majesty," was the reply.

“John of Ainhault has my orders for to-morrow.”

“To-morrow?” repeated Col. Miron, looking inquiringly at the Emperor.

“To-morrow, in the throne room,” said the Emperor, “I will see this creature. John of Ainhault will command the Crown Prince’s company; you will command the Imperial Guard, and Admiral Sefton the Marines. Neither yourself or John of Ainhault will see him again until you see him before me. You will see to it that he be informed that I will see him there at the hour of three to-morrow afternoon. He will be conducted thither, but will enter unattended. We will see if he will dare to disobey any of these, my orders.”

Col. Miron remained to receive final instructions, and, being at last dismissed, withdrew, greatly disturbed in mind as to the issue of the coming interview, leaving the mighty Paul to the merciless lashings of an unfaltering memory.

CHAPTER XVIII

In a noble apartment of Castle Ainhault, a splendidly palatial residence, second only to the Imperial residence itself, Miriam, Archduchess of Ainhault and Princess of Polen, sat waiting, alone.

From its windows at break of day, she had watched the two great iron-clads as they steamed in and came to anchor, just within the beautiful harbor of Carodina.

With the aid of a powerful field-glass, she had seen that a cutter had put out from each, and run quickly to land.

Not long after, the great black hull of the gigantic liner hove into view, and slowly and majestically made her way into the harbor.

That was some hours ago, and still no message had come.

She was sorely perplexed. She had sent her ladies away, they troubled and annoyed her.

Why had not John of Ainhault come? What meant this delay?

She had been greatly annoyed over the entire affair; such an affair she had never known before. When the Crown Prince was reported to have been killed, she had been greatly relieved, for never had he been anything but a "thorn in the flesh."

From his earliest infancy he had been spoiled and pampered by all, until he had developed into the most selfish, arrogant, and vicious young man in all Europe.

She had known and loved his beautiful, saintly mother, and that he did not seem to possess one single trait of her noble, beautiful character, had been a great shock and disappointment to her; at the same time her sound judgment had shown her that the outcome could scarcely, in reason, have been different; for, by the early death of the Empress, his mother, he had been placed almost entirely in the hands of unscrupulous and disinterested hirelings, to the end that he had been completely spoiled.

Well she remembered the stormy scene that had taken place between the Emperor and herself when she had requested that the child be transferred to her home, to be brought up under her supervision and in company with her son. A scene that had caused a breach between her powerful family, which was descended from the royal house of Polen, and the Emperor; and but for the one fact that her own son was a descendant of the Imperial family, and the heir-apparent after the Crown Prince, she would have taken him and returned to her own people.

And so it must be acknowledged that it was with a considerable relief that she received the shocking report of the death of the Crown Prince, for it removed the only obstacle to the succession of John of Ainhault to the throne, and at the same time promised to put an end to the outrageously lawless party that had gathered around the Crown Prince, and which began seriously to threaten the peace of the Empire.

When she had been made acquainted with the entire story of the Archduke Walther's treasonable act, she had been shocked beyond measure. At first she had refused to believe it, insisting that it was a scheme of the Emperor

and Walther to keep her son from succeeding to the throne, and so to that end she had denied the affirmation hotly, but finally, after having been convinced of the truth of the whole scandalous affair by John of Ainhault himself, she had, with great reluctance, given her consent to allowing him to take charge of the searching party that went out to that new and almost unknown country to find the real Crown Prince.

Weeks had elapsed without bringing any word from the searching party and those behind were compelled to wait, and listen, and wonder; for already the wretched secret was out, and the Empire rang from end to end with the scandal of it, while the great world about was standing aghast at the shocking situation.

To her it had been almost intolerable. The Emperor had shut himself up in his apartments and went nowhere, except upon affairs of state, and rumor said that the state to which he had come boded no good to the coming man.

Later a message had arrived which announced that the stolen Crown Prince had been found, and would soon be brought back to his own country.

When the message had been brought to the Emperor, he had gone into a furious rage, and for a time it was feared that he would have to be put under restraint, but gradually he had fought off the wretched attack and since that time had been more morose and sullen than before, seeing only those who were in immediate attendance upon him.

And now the ships had arrived; and knowing all of the trying situation in all of its details, but receiving no message, had succeeded in reducing the Archduchess Miriam to a state that bordered nearly upon distraction.

At that moment there came the distant sound of horse's hoofs beating upon the ground, and moving quickly to one of the great windows, she saw a single horseman galloping swiftly up the avenue toward the castle.

The man approaching was John of Ainhault, and summoning an attendant, and commanding that he be directed to her private apartments, she withdrew, and thither he found her a little later, after having removed from him the stains of travel.

Silently, yet affectionately, he greeted her, for she was a proud stately woman, and leading her to a seat he asked, "And my mother is well?"

"Your mother is well, my son, but was growing exceedingly anxious over you and this wretched affair; but I find you, my son, much changed: what has occurred to put this heavy shadow upon your face?" said she as she passed her hand across his broad, white brow.

"A shadow? my mother," said he.

"Yes, my son, a shadow. A mother's eye is quick, and there are lines there that I never saw before. Tell me, my son, has it to do with this wretched affair?" said she as she looked anxiously into his face. "Tell me, my son," said she speaking quickly, "tell me of your journey! Your message said that the lost Prince had been found; yet I almost fear to ask of him; the whole outrageous affair has almost turned the world topsy turvy, and we start almost at a shadow, and I am beginning to tremble for the end."

"Ah, my mother, and what will the end be?" groaned he. "My soul sickens within me when I think of this man and what lies before him."

"This man!" echoed she, "what do you mean? Whom do you mean?"

"I mean him, the man whom we have brought back with us; the most outraged man in the world to-day; the son of my father's brother and my Prince."

"Your Prince!" exclaimed she, "what do you mean? Your Prince! This barbarian? Do you then believe——?"

"Listen, my mother," said he interrupting her, "I know what you feel and think, for I had the same thoughts and feelings. I also know what your ambitions were for me, but that could not be. I know that I am my father's son, and heir to the Imperial Throne of Carona, also that I am a Prince of the Royal House of Polen, but royalty sits but illy upon my brow, and now that I have seen these people and this man——" he stopped.

"This man! These people! My son!" said she; "tell me, what do you mean? This man! You have found him! Tell me of him."

A deep silence pervaded the room broken only by the low voice of the man as he related his wonderful tale. When he came to that part of the story, the night at the opera, she became visibly agitated and interrupted him.

"Walther recognized him!" exclaimed she. "How?"

"From the striking resemblance to the Empress, his mother," was the reply.

"And he?" she questioned.

"Is positively the handsomest man that I have ever seen," said he.

"His mother, the Empress," said she, "was the most beautiful woman in all Europe; but tell me of him! He was singing, you say, Faust? His mother also had a beau-

tiful voice, the most beautiful of any, aside from the great Gardoni. My son, you are convincing me against myself." Her doubts were fast disappearing.

With white drawn face and stiffening lips he told her of the tragic death of Margaret Raymond. Of the agony of the man Alfred Raymond. Of the broken-hearted motherless daughter. He spared no part of the sad story. Minutely he pictured every detail of the parting scene at the home of John Raymond when he received his commission from the lips of Margaret Raymond.

"And this girl, this girl whom you call Margaret Raymond — ? This girl whom he calls his sister? "

"Is the most beautiful woman that I have ever met," said he fervently.

His mother looked sharply into his face, but forbore questioning him further.

"But he, the Prince, how do you call him, Alfred? "

He bowed.

"How did he bear himself when you convinced him that he was the rightful heir? "

"We have not yet convinced him," said the young Archduke.

"Not yet convinced him? " echoed she. "Do you mean to tell me — ? "

He interrupted her.

"Listen, my mother; as we were leaving port upon our return, the tugs had drawn us far down the harbor. He had shut himself within his suite and dismissed all of his attendants. Evidently the great propeller of the vessel roused him; he rushed from his room, across the great salon. Miron was near, and as he rushed across the deck

to the rail Miron, who, like ourselves, thought that he was going to throw himself overboard, darted forward and thrust out his arm to stop him. As he reached the side of the ship the land was fast disappearing from view. With arms wide stretched out, and all his soul in his face, the saddest cry I have ever heard broke from his lips."

"And that cry?" said she almost breathlessly.

"My Land! My Country! My Home! And with that cry I think his heart broke," said he, his voice tremulous and low.

Miriam, proud, stately, and a royal princess, yet a true woman, wept bitterly.

"My mother," said he, as he put his arms around her, "I thank you for those tears; now I know he, our Prince, has found another friend, of which he has only too few. You say you find me changed? I reply, I am changed. The old John of Ainhault lives no more, but a new John of Ainhault has risen, his life, his all devoted to the cause of this his new found Prince. But I fear, I fear greatly for him."

"You fear for him?" said his mother. "You speak in riddles."

"Listen, my mother, I have a strange tale I would relate. Years ago, while my father still lived, I went with him upon a hunting expedition in the great forest of Polen. While working through the great woods the beaters started the most magnificent buck I ever saw; it seemed impossible such a noble creature, and one so near perfection, could actually be real. He disdained to run, but turned and breathed out defiance upon us; he trumpeted, he challenged. My father forbade anyone firing upon him, but desired to

take him alive, so to that end he dispatched messengers to bring nets, great nets innumerable; they were brought. Then as we advanced slowly, he retreated, contesting every foot of the way; at last we reached a thick wooded copse which we surrounded; then we stretched the nets in the hands of the attendants and beaters with instructions for those who held the inner ones that they should release them upon him at the first dash."

"Our plans were all well laid. The principal openings were well lined; then the beaters began to work from the rear and sides. Suddenly, down the great avenue of trees he came. He was wonderful: such antlers. Such a head. A superb body; he was, as I have said, magnificent, perfect."

"Catching sight of the nets stretched out before him, with a loud defiant bellow he lowered his beautiful head and dashed into the first one: the keepers flung up the ends and let go; so with the second and the third; then the others held on and closed in around him; although terribly hampered he fought desperately; at last they bound him until he could not move. All precautions were taken to keep him from injuring himself. We were elated; we had captured him; taken him alive. We sent for carriers. Every precaution was taken; he was far too valuable to jeopardize in any way. Very carefully we carried him back to Polenda. We rejoiced greatly, greatly overjoyed at our success. We carried him to the great stable paddock, whose brick walls rise twenty feet in the air; there we loosed him, and hurrying from the reach of his blade-like hoofs and horns, we watched.

"With one mighty bound he reached his feet. For a

moment he stood as if dazed; then a leathern shackle dropped from him to the ground. He looked down quickly; gathering himself together he bounded high in the air, and drawing his polished hoofs close, he sprung upon the thongs that had bound him until he had cut them to ribbons. Then he flung up his head and trumpeted. His eyes blazed with fury. The steam fairly gushed from his nostrils. He almost went mad from the indignity offered him. He saw the wall before him; he wheeled like lightning. Another wall; again he wheeled; a third, and a fourth; he saw himself hemmed in upon all sides; his fury grew; then, with a splendid stately tread, slowly he backed, slowly until he had nearly reached the wall behind him; then, with a shrill bellow of defiance, he shot forward like an arrow from a bow. He disdained to leap; walls should not hold him. With head bent low like a bullet from a gun he struck the solid masonry."

"There was a crash as those magnificent antlers splintered like so many finely polished ivories, a sickening thud as that beautiful head crashed against the cruel, unyielding walls, almost instantly we heard a low, gasping, sobbing moan; a moment his splendid body swayed lightly, then fell to the hard pavement, dead."

"My son!" ejaculated the Archduchess, who had listened almost breathlessly, "your tale — ?"

"Is the tale of Alfred Raymond, Crown Prince of Carona and son of the Emperor Paul, only differing in that the magnificent stag that we captured could have escaped, at least he had a chance, whereas this man had no chance. We came upon him in the open in the guise of friends; he came to us with his hand outstretched and the

palm turned up; as it were, with his guard down; and we struck him the most cowardly, the vilest blow in the face — ”

“ John! ” she cried, as her face flushed with shame.

“ Yes, my mother, ” said he low and bitterly, “ we struck him the vilest, most cowardly blow across the face that one man could deal to another. We killed the woman who had succored and sheltered him; broke the heart and made desolate the sister who loved and idolized him; then we bound him, body and soul, and tore him from the land and home of his love, and have brought him a hopeless, helpless prisoner to be made the scapegoat for the offences of the most wretched ingrate upon the face of the earth to-day! ”

“ John! My son! What do you mean? ” cried she in alarm. “ The Emperor — ! ”

“ Is beside himself with hatred and fury, and upon the head of this innocent man he will pour out all the vile spleen his degraded heart and mind can conceive. ”

“ The Emperor will do this? ” said she.

“ Yes, ” was the reply, “ he has caused him to be housed in the rooms occupied by the Empress, his mother; he deems him but a great rough barbarian and lout; he seeks to cover him with shame and confusion; he refuses to listen to one word. He does not dream what manner of man he has to deal with; nor does he, Alfred Raymond—I cannot think of him as other, and surely no other name graces him so well—have any idea of the Emperor’s antipathy toward him. ”

“ But, ” said she, “ should not some one, you, yourself, go to him and tell him? ”

“Mother mine, you do not know this man, nor can I tell you of him beyond that he is his mother’s son, also the son of the woman who reared him, for his simple ‘I wish’ is mightier than the Emperor’s ‘I will.’”

“John! John!” said she, grasping him by the arm, her face becoming pale with emotion, “you do not think this man will dash himself to pieces to his death against the iron walls of an inflexible destiny?”

The face of John of Ainhault turned ghastly white. “God forbid!” he groaned.

“You say the mother who reared him,” she was repeating his words, “was a noble woman?”

“The noblest, grandest I ever met, next to my own mother,” he replied.

She let the allusion pass. “The mother who bore him,” said she, “was the most saintly and noble woman I ever knew, and the only person who ever humbled the mighty Paul; aye, humbled him in the dust. And mayhap her son —” she ceased. “When will the Emperor see him?” questioned she.

“To-morrow, in the great throne room; the Imperial Guard, also the Crown Prince’s own company will be on duty, the scene will be the most imposing the Emperor can devise; the Crown Prince’s company will be under my orders, the Imperial Guard will be under Col. Miron, and the Navies will be under Admiral Sefton.”

“And can nothing be done?” said she.

“Absolutely nothing,” was the reply.

Long and earnestly Miriam, Archduchess of Ainhault and Princess of Polen, prayed that night for the unwelcome unhappy man who had been brought an unwilling son to his father’s house.

CHAPTER XIX

The wildest rumors were afloat. All Europe was standing, as it were, breathless. The shock of the tragic death of the supposed Crown Prince, then the startlingly shocking report of the Archduke Walther's seditious act, and the exposure, then the report of the secret mission of John of Ainhault to that distant almost unknown country.

Now the wires had flashed the news all abroad that the searching party had returned; that the rightful heir had been found, and had come to his own.

"But no man has seen him!" said one.

"Yes," said another, "John of Ainhault has seen him, Col. Miron has seen him, Admiral Sefton has seen him, also the Archduke Walther."

"But John of Ainhault has scarcely been seen by any man, while Col. Miron —, Col. Miron has been closeted for hours with the Emperor, and none had dared to question him."

"And Admiral Sefton?"

"Admiral Sefton had nothing to say."

"Well, but there was Walther."

"What! Have you not heard?"

"Heard what?"

"Why, about Walther?"

"What then of Walther?"

"Why Walther has been banished to his estate of Rildorph and is a state prisoner there. While the poor unhappy Archduchess —"

"Well, let Walther suffer! Had he not brought all this suffering upon a poor innocent lady? Let him bear the consequence of his treachery."

"Yes, that is true; but speak not so loud, but 'tis said that the Emperor has not yet seen his own son."

"What! You don't say so! What a shocking state of affairs!"

"Suppose he should be anything like that wild barbarous land from which he came; what would they do with him? Why, they would be the laughing stock of the whole world."

"Then you have not heard?"

"Heard? I have heard nothing. I have been at my loom, busy, all morning and have not heard. What is it?"

"Why, the Crown Prince's own company have been ordered to the palace."

"The Crown Prince's company!"

"Yes, and the Imperial Guard."

"The Imperial Guard!"

"Yes, and the Marines."

"The Marines! Now may the saints preserve us! What are we coming to? Why, he must be a wild man!"

And so the wildest stories were told and retold, and lost nothing in the telling.

Meanwhile, in the great throne room of the Imperial Palace of Carodina, a room barbarous in its splendor and magnificence, was being enacted a scene that almost defies description.

Within a great stained oriel window at the north end of the room, under a magnificent canopy of deep electric-blue velvet, upon a slightly raised dais, stood the throne

of the Emperor, while to the left, upon one slightly lower, was the ivory throne of the Empress Charlotte, which had never been used since the death of that unhappy lady.

Upon such occasions as required, for Miriam, Archduchess of Ainhault, who stood next in line to the Empress, a small gold chair had been used; the Archduchess having refused to occupy the throne of the Empress.

The Emperor, seated upon the magnificent ebony throne, was attired in the uniform of the Imperial Guard. Clasped to his shoulders, with great diamond-studded clasps and sweeping away in massive folds, was the great Imperial robe of deepest crimson velvet, lined with spotless ermine. About his waist was buckled, with a massive jeweled buckle, a heavily bejeweled belt, from which hung a matchless Damascine blade, with flashing diamond-studded hilt. Upon his breast blazed the great diamond star of the Imperial House, while upon a velvet pillow at his left rested the matchless jeweled Imperial Crown.

In a great semi-circle from the left and right, and back from the throne, stretched a great body of statesmen and dignitaries gaily attired, and literally ablaze with the jeweled orders of their positions.

Along the west side of the enormous room was stationed the company of the Crown Prince, with John of Ainhault at their head, a superb sight; row upon row, their uniforms of purest white with belts of broad gold, with swords, gold epaulettes and lacings, glossy black hip-boots, black gauntlets, white helmets, with long sweeping black plumes, caught under the chin with a gold chain, they were almost incomparable.

Face to face with them, over against the east side, the

light from the great western windows streaming upon their scarlet and gold uniforms, long black hip-boots, gold helmets with white plumes, and glittering belts and swords, with Col. Miron like a graven image at their head, stood the Imperial Guard.

At the foot of the two columns of men, or at the south end of the room, drawn across the full width, leaving a broad passage from the great golden doors, were stationed the Marines with Admiral Sefton, standing alone, immediately in front, and at the right of the passageway.

In startling contrast, with not a gleam of metal or flash of jewel seen anywhere upon them, attired in deep soft blue with spotless white facings, they presented a sight rarely ever looked upon.

As the bell in the watch tower boomed forth the hour of three, the great golden doors swung back noiselessly, and two pages dressed in scarlet livery entered, preceding a single black clad figure.

Passing through the line of Marines to the open space upon the richly polished floor they halted just within the foremost line of men, and, turning, saluted, as that silent dark clad figure passed between them to the open space beyond.

An almost breathless silence rested upon that vast assemblage of men.

Every man stood as if carved from stone; not an eyelash quivered. Every eye in that great company was fixed in a stony stare upon the wall opposite.

It was a moment of painful intensity. Then a voice, clear and distinct, sounded over that great hush.

“His Royal Highness, the Crown Prince Alfred.”

At sound of those, to him, empty sounding titles prefixed to his name, Alfred seemingly woke to life. A slight flush spread over his handsome pallid face.

He lifted up his head and looking up the length of that great room he saw the scarlet bejeweled figure of the Emperor.

As his eyes beheld for the first time that gorgeously apparelled form, over him began to steal the same feeling of antagonism that had come upon him when he had first met the Imperial party in his own house in New York.

When the great doors were thrown open, preceding his entrance, with one quick searching glance he had seen the great array of troops drawn up in strict attention in all their glittering array.

Now, in the hush following the announcement, he felt intuitively the hostility extended toward him by that scarlet clad figure upon the great ebony throne.

They had told him that he was the son of this man. A sense of the awful unreality of it all came upon him, and in some way it seemed to afford him a relief. This man his father? Then all of this magnificence was his. He tried to think it, to realize it, but it woke no feeling of pride or elation in him. Suddenly he thought of the plains of Arizona. Her magnificent sweeps, her superb distances, her grand mountains, her gorgeous coloring; all, all; and in that remembrance his present surroundings became small and weak; cheap and tawdry in comparison.

This man his father? Then surely father never met son in this wise before.

Up surged the old feeling of resentment, of antagonism. With head held proudly erect, those grand golden-

gray eyes flashing fearless and calm, with all the old boyish freedom and grace, he strode up that great silent room until he stood directly before the great ebony throne.

With a disdainful sneer upon his aged face, the haughty Emperor Paul ignored the splendid man before him, and continued to gaze with fixed unseeing eyes at the distant pictured wall.

The hush deepened. The silence was becoming painfully oppressive.

The nerves of every man in the great white-robed company of the Crown Prince were stretched to their utmost tension. Not one had dared to disobey the strict orders that had been given, that not an eye should turn to look upon the new-come man until the Emperor should so order.

The face of John of Ainhault was black with shame.

Although the Imperial Guard was the Emperor's own company, not a man among them but realized the brutality of the situation, and, although a stolid unbroken line, were beginning to become painfully uncomfortable. The face of Col. Miron looked like a graven grizzled sphynx, only the lids of the eyes half raised.

Admiral Sefton and the Marines had not moved. The great bejeweled assembly of silk and velvet clad dignitaries about the throne seemed absolutely void of life.

Alfred looked into that old haggard vindictive face, and studied the features intently.

He had looked upon his own face in a mirror, and here he saw something that troubled him. A vague indistinct familiarity, as it were, the shadow of his own face, in part, but oh, so horribly disfigured by pride, hate and all manner of black filthiness.

And this man, they said, was his father. He was beginning to fear that it might be so.

But if he, this Emperor, were his father, why had he chosen to bring him before him in this manner? Why had he surrounded himself with this almost numberless cordon of armed men? Why all of this useless display?

He looked again into those proud disdainful features, and for the first he began to become aware of the intense silence that hung over that magnificent room and gorgeous assemblage of men like a pall.

Now he recalled that not a head had turned, not an eye had looked in his direction.

Was it a plan?

He had heard and pitied the implied sneers that had been offered to his country, his beloved Columbia, but he could afford to smile and be patient with these poor misguided people, they did not know her as he knew her; they knew only their own weakness and decay, so they could not appreciate or understand the glorious freedom and life of his magnificent land.

But why had they elected to receive him thus? Was it all prearranged? Was it done to humble him? Involuntarily his head went up more proudly erect. To humble him? For what? He had not asked even to come to this their land. They had brought him; they had used all manner of argument, closely bordering on coercion.

His grand golden-gray eyes began to flash dangerously and give out little glints of green.

The position and scene to him were only ridiculous; well they had created it, and he would terminate it.

"You sent for me? You wished to see me? I am

here. You will tell me what you wish of me and I will go."

The words, simple, comprehensive, the tone calm, polite, yet cold, penetrated to every ear in that great company.

Every man present fairly held his breath. Never before had any one dared to address the mighty Paul without being ordered to do so. The present act was unprecedented. The Emperor was seen to struggle greatly to retain control of himself.

"You will do what?" Harsh, fierce, strident, the words burst from the now thoroughly infuriated Emperor.

"You heard all that I had to say, and it is not necessary for me to repeat." Like the fierce cut of a lash the words whipped the air, and almost one could see their red stain across the livid features of the infuriated man upon the throne.

"I heard all you had to say," the Emperor's voice rang out shrilly over the now thoroughly startled throng. "It is not necessary for you to repeat! Why, you boor! You lout! Your cursed whelp of —"

"Hold!" That one word rang out in clarion like tones and stayed the mad vile imprecation upon the lips of the half insane Paul.

Every man present was horrified at the turn events had taken, and inwardly trembled for the issue.

Alfred Raymond was going on, and every ear was strained to catch every tone of his splendid voice.

"I came not here of my own will or wish. Your attitude I do not understand, nor do I consider it of enough importance to attempt to even consider it. I have no

wish to, nor shall I attempt to bandy words with you. A quarrel may be to you a source of great enjoyment and entertainment, to me it is simply disgusting."

The Emperor sunk back against the great carved arms of the throne, speechless. This was not as he had planned. With all the fierce vindictiveness of his undisciplined nature, he had planned to utterly crush and annihilate this man; and now at the very outset, he it was who was fast becoming stripped of every vestige of dignity and authority, and finding himself in the very position he had arranged for another. He seemed fairly paralyzed, while the assembled men almost gasped with astonishment.

They had been led to believe the common report of the land from which this man had come, and had fully expected an uncouth, untutored, half-savage being; but instead, here was a man of such dignity and refinement, such lofty and genuine nobility, that in comparison they with all their boasted superiority appeared only poor and ignoble.

That the present arrangement had been entered into to place this man at every possible disadvantage, and put him to confusion and shame, simply to satisfy the spleen of a degraded old man, was now apparent to all, but, on the contrary, he, this man, was the only one present who appeared wholly at ease. He was not only master of himself, but had almost instantly mastered every man in that vast, brilliant company.

They had come upon what had appeared to be a simple, sleek young animal; but instead they had aroused a magnificent young lion, incomparable in his beauty, strength and courage.

"You have brought me before you," that splendid

voice rang out, clear, distinct, decisive, "but for what purpose I cannot understand, nor will I attempt to hide from you the fact that I have but little interest in your motive for so doing."

The Emperor cringed.

"That you have sought to humiliate and embarrass me, I am now fully satisfied; your object in so doing, I repeat, does not even interest me. Were it not that I pitied and despised you for the smallness and meanness of your mind, I will not speak of your soul, for I doubt much if you have such a thing, I might, perhaps, feel annoyed."

The aged man upon the throne struggled desperately to keep his eyes fixed anywhere but upon that handsome, indignant face before him.

Those grand gray eyes were blazing now with such a fire and light as seemed to scorch and burn wherever they rested. Up from that great assembly of men went one mighty gasp for breath.

"Look into my face!" The words rang out clear, imperative, compelling.

The mighty Emperor, at that command, looked for the first time upon the face of his outraged son, and at that look his form seemed to contract and shrink as before fire.

A low inarticulate cry burst from his trembling lips.

The face before him was the living counterpart of his beautiful, outraged Empress, only intensified a hundred-fold.

"I will strike you as you have stricken me."

How those words of hers rolled upon him now with irresistible force and meaning.

Those grand golden-gray eyes seemed to go down to

the innermost recesses of his black, horribly disfigured soul with a deadly white light, and laid all the vileness that dwelt there out before him in a degrading shameful array.

"With a thousand swords have you surrounded yourself, and I must commend your courage. Very courageous must the great Paul be when he fears one man, and him alone, and unarmed. I must commend such courage. Aye," and his voice rang out with peculiar and biting scorn, "even such courage as I see drawn up along your walls, row upon row, rank upon rank." A flush stole over the face of every man present.

"If for intention to intimidate," continued he, "let me say to you now that the land from whence I came has never yet bred a coward, or a poltroon."

A cold chill seemed to rest upon all present. The silence now resembled the great silence of death.

"They say of me that I am your son. God, indeed, pity me if that were true, for I have yet to learn of the first redeeming quality that has descended from or been born to the Imperial House of Carona; and lest there remain any doubt in your mind, let me say to you now, that I would rather be the child of the poorest laborer in all America than to be the heir to the greatest reigning house in all Europe. I would not exchange one foot of her noble soil for all of your possessions North, South, East or West.

"How dare you to come into the presence of decent, honorable men? And yet you have had the temerity to send for and bring me into your presence; a presence so vile that it can only contaminate all with which it comes in contact. Who and what are you? A man-made Em-

peror. Have you ever for one moment tried to realize the genuine loftiness and nobility to which the people of this land have elected your house? Have you ever esteemed the great privilege you enjoy at the hands of your God and Creator? Have you ever, even for one moment, tried to discharge one of the simplest duties that rests upon you as Emperor of this people? Have you ever, even for one moment, lived such a life that your people, the people to whom you were called as an example and as a leader, or even one among those teeming millions would care to copy? No! No! But the rather; for all the wretched cruelties of your forbears, for all the filthy despicable acts of your own vile nature and life, they lie to-day a people, their faces black with shame, their eyes in the dust.

“They have tried to convince me that you are my father, that I am your son. What manner of father were you to the man who died upon your mountain side a few short months ago? Did you ever perform the first act that would have had even a tendency to add one jot of manhood to an already vitiated nature? No! No! But by every act, every word you sought to lower and degrade it to a greater degree, so that to-day you are a thousand, aye, ten thousand times more guilty than he.”

Out rolled the torrent of words, nor could any man stay them. The vast concourse of men were paralyzed, stunned. Alfred Raymond was superb in his scorn and indignation.

“You, a father!” Oh, the cutting scorn. It is impossible to describe it. “You a father! Aye, and before that, you a husband! Can you for one moment picture yourself as such? You who took that holy woman of the

North, and by every form of deceit and treachery, betrayed her more foully than was ever woman betrayed before. How have you dared to profane the holy word of love? Love! Love! Was it love that prompted that black crime? Was it love that sent that noble woman to an untimely and shameful death? No! Call it by its own name. Call it by the name of your own filthiness. A filthiness so vile that in all Hell there can be found no depths deep or black enough to hide it."

"You a father!"

The Emperor lay back helpless against the carved arms of the great ebony throne; he seemed half stunned, yet the words of this man rolled upon him like a torrent, flaying and blistering him in every part. For the first time he saw himself as he really was; and the picture was appalling. He who looked upon himself as infallible, almost divine, now crouched before this man, the son of his beautiful Empress, like a pitiable, beaten hound.

"You a father," Alfred went on. "Have you ever been a father to the people God gave you to rule and govern? What do you know of the joy or sorrow of a parent? Of the high holiness of such a position? Of the deep sense of the obligation assumed?"

"Have you ever held a little infant form in your strong sheltering arms and felt that little warm, throbbing, living body against your heart, the clasp of those little velvety baby hands against your face, the fragrant breath of those little innocent lips upon your own, flesh of your flesh, blood of your blood, bone of your bone?"

Paul the Emperor could not remove his eyes from that splendid face before him. Every word rolled as

molten burning metal, seared and burned him to his innermost soul. Yet, through it all he could hear, like the distant echo of a knell, the words of the beautiful Northern Princess, "through him I will break you as you have broken me!" But her son was still speaking, and he could not choose but listen, "And knowing yourself for the vile wretch that you are, you have brought me here to shamefully humiliate and heap your vile spleen upon me. How dared you, in the sight of God and man, take the sacred name and obligation of a father upon yourself? Had you been my father, as they say you are, and were you that in heart, would you not have come for me yourself, and not have sent an hireling and a servant? Were it my child, my son, who had been carried away, even to the uttermost parts of the world, do you think that I would have waited to have had him brought to me? No! There is no power that would have restrained me from going to him, though I had gone on foot every step of the way.

"Had it been my son, think you I would have been that unnatural creature that would have endeavored, in the contemptible smallness of my nature, to have forced him into the position in which your degraded nature has endeavored to place me to-day?

"Were your efforts not so pitiable, they would be despicable, therefore I pity you too much to despise you.

"And yet, to your contemptible smallness must I acknowledge myself grateful; for by every act, every word of yours, you have satisfied me wholly that you are not my father, and I am not your son, for which I say, gratefully and reverently, I thank God! And again, I thank God!"

John of Ainhault at those words wheeled toward the

speaker as if struck a sharp blow. Col. Miron never moved, although his fierce eyes were blazing with a great terrible light.

And now every eye was turned upon that splendid face and figure that stood so proudly and fearlessly before the great ebony throne.

"The seed may have proceeded from your loins, but I do not believe that God ever decreed that you should be my father, or that I should be your son; and I pity you. I believe myself to be, by the grace of God, the son of her, Charlotte of the North, and by the hand of God, the son of her, Margaret Raymond, the grandest and noblest woman that ever lived upon the earth; and now I return to her country and mine, the land God and she gave to me. To her daughter, the loving and beloved sister God and she have given to me; and know you that in the love of My Land! My Country! and My Home! and in the pure love of the child of that noble woman, I shall find such compensation as no dying, decaying dynasty upon earth can ever give. Trouble me no more. Farewell."

Alfred Raymond turned, and as he did so a deafening hiss of blade against scabbard rent the air.

A thousand blades leaped forth and were held aloft, suspended in mid-air. Not a blade quivered, and the sinking sun flashed them into uncounted tongues of living flame.

With head proudly erect, a smile upon his handsome face, his grand gray eyes glowing like golden fires, his proud free step ringing out from the polished floor, he walked down that great room between those walls of up-raised steel.

He was free! Free! Almost he seemed to be walking upon the air. Hope again lived. He was going back to his own; the own that he loved; the own that loved him. As he reached the great golden doors the leaves swung back. For one moment he paused; then he turned toward that shrinking, shriveled figure upon the great ebony throne. Crash! Every sword leaped into the scabbard. Every man in the Crown Prince's company went down upon his knee. Every man in the Imperial Guard. Every man in the Royal Marines.

The Emperor leaned forward, all his soul looking out from his eyes, striving, as it were, to fix the imprint of that form upon his heart before it should pass from his sight.

One moment Alfred stood in the great arched doorway, proudly erect and free. A ray of sunlight lingered upon the beautiful gold-brown head like a celestial fire; one moment, then he saluted and was gone.

The Emperor slowly sank back against the arms of the great ebony throne. As that vast company of men arose to their feet, John of Ainhault stepped quickly forward to the throne and addressed the broken, reclining figure there. "Your Majesty," his voice rang out cold and clear, "here is my sword." As he spoke he drew it from its scabbard. "Sworn to your service it has never served another; it never will serve another. I herewith return it to you."

He lifted it in his two hands and touched its blade to his lips. "I hereby renounce my allegiance to my country and to you." Quickly catching the sword by the point and hilt he bent it across his knee and broke it in two.

A sound that was almost a groan went up from the whole company.

He laid the broken pieces at the feet of the Emperor who sat spell bound; then he loosed his belt and said, as he dropped it upon the floor at his feet, "For I go with this man; his land shall be my land. His destiny shall be by destiny. His God shall be my God." And turning, passed through a small doorway and was gone.

"Men of the Royal Marines! About face! March!"

Col. Miron was in command, and the order rang out like a battle cry.

As one man they wheeled; as one man they stepped.

"Men of His Highness' company! About face! March!"

Only the rythmic sound of moving feet as that splendid company marched away.

The soul of the old battle-scarred veteran was stretched upon the rack, cruelly wrenched between love and duty; for this man, Alfred Raymond, had become the very apple of his eye, yet he never faltered.

"Men of the Royal Marines! About face! March" It was Admiral Sefton who gave the order, and under cover of the departure of the Marines the great personages near the throne departed, Col. Miron alone remaining, standing at the right of the Emperor.

The great room was empty, deserted.

A great sobbing sigh came up from the depths of the throne.

"Miron! Miron!" the Emperor spoke in a shrill whisper.

"Miron! Miron!" Again that shrill whisper, as he

grasped Col. Miron fiercely by the wrist, his wild eyes gazing intently into the vacancy before him.

"Miron! Did you see him? Did you see him? My son! My son! He is mine! Mine!" The shrill old voice rose in a weird cry. "Her son! Her son! Hers and mine! And he dared to affront me! Me, the Emperor! Did you see him, Miron? Like his mother! Like her! So she looked that day! As he looked to-day! But where is he, Miron?" said he, looking vaguely around. "Where are they all? We are alone, Miron, you and I."

Then he looked down and saw the broken sword of John of Ainhault lying at his feet with the discarded belt not far away upon the polished floor.

For a moment he gazed at it intently, as if striving to recall how it came there, then his benumbed faculties gradually awoke. "A broken sword. A broken sword." In a hoarse sepulchral tone involuntarily he repeated the words of John of Ainhault. "'I renounce my allegiance to my country and to you.' He of Ainhault has renounced his country? He will go with this man, Miron? Where? Where?" said he fiercely.

"'His land shall be my land. His destiny shall be my destiny. His God shall be my God.'" As Col. Miron repeated those words of John of Ainhault they rang with an indescribable moan through the great, desolate, empty room.

"His land!" said the Emperor. "Where is this land? What is this land?"

"The grandest country I have ever seen. The noblest race of men under the sun to-day; and a land that is destined to be the greatest in the world." The voice of the

old warrior rang out like a trumpet. His words seemed almost a prophecy.

“And they are going? Going? And leave me here alone? No! No! It shall not be!” His voice rose almost to a shriek. “It shall not be! It is treason! And treason is punishable by death! They shall not go! They shall not go! I, the Emperor, declare it! Here!” said he, tearing at his jeweled trappings, “take them away! Take them away! Quick! Take me to him! To him! At once!”

He was greatly excited. Miron called an attendant, and assisted by him they conducted him to his own apartments.

The great throne room was empty, deserted. Upon the dais before the great carved ebony throne lay a sword; below it, upon the polished floor, a discarded jeweled belt.

CHAPTER XX

As the leaves of the great golden doors swung to and shut out the brilliant scene, Alfred turned and darted along the corridor, running like an Indian.

He was free! Free! Almost he could have shouted for joy. Were he in the open he felt he could not restrain himself. He was still in this great gloomy prison. He did not see its magnificence, its luxury, he saw only its grim ghastliness; he heard only the groans of the people who had given their lives, their all, to help create it, and so it still oppressed him; he wanted only to be free from it, so he hurried, hurried.

Reaching the door of the Empress' suite he waved aside the attendant there, and opening the door himself, entered and closed it after him.

"Jasper! Oh, Uncle Jasper!" he called.

"Yes, suh. Yes, suh. Ah's a comin'," said the wavering voice of the old man from an inner room.

"Hurry up, Uncle! Hurry!" The old boyish impetuosity had returned. The man was gone. The boy had returned. The handsome face was flushed. The grand golden-gray eyes were gleaming.

"Whaffo's de mattah, suh? Whaffo's all dis yeah commoshun, suh?" said the old colored man, hurrying in.

"We're going home, Uncle; do you hear? We're going home!" said Alfred, catching him by his frail bent shoulders and shaking him gently. "We're going home!"

"Home, chile?" said the quavering old voice, while

the dim old eyes peered up into those great glowing orbs above him with a pleading, beseeching look. "Home?"

"Yes, Uncle; home. To our home; yours and mine; our America!"

"Bress de Lawd!" ejaculated the old man fervently.

"Amen," supplemented Alfred. "And now, hurry Uncle, let's pack up our things and get away just as quickly as we can; this place stifles me."

"An' you ain't no Crown Prince, suh?"

"Thank God! No, Uncle."

"Bress de Lawd! Bress de Lawd!" said the old darkey low and fervently. "Yo' said we's agoin'; chile, yo's a gwine to tek Uncle Jaspah wiv yo'?"

"Surely, Uncle!" replied Alfred, half surprised, "unless you don't care to go."

"Why, chile, ah ain't got nowhar' else to go. Ah ain't got noboddy nor nuffin." A great wave of desolation seemed to sweep over the black, bent form of the old darkey.

"Why, yes you have, Uncle! You've got me."

"En you'll tek Uncle Jaspah? You'll tek Uncle Jaspah wiv yo'?" The old man was fairly trembling with pathetic eagerness. "Ah'll tek sich keer ub yo'."

"No, you won't, Uncle; it's I who will take care of you," said Alfred, all eager and excited. "But come! We must hurry! Hurry!"

"In the name of the Emperor, open!" Loud, discordant, commanding, came the order from beyond the closed door.

Alfred Raymond stopped short. The old colored man shrunk back.

"In the name of the Emperor, open!" Again came that sharp command.

Alfred stepped quickly toward the closed door.

"No King or Emperor enters here. All of my prerogatives as a guest I now assume; I have done nothing to jeopardize them, therefore these rooms are sacred to my use. Let this matter go no further. I have spoken." Sharp, cold, cutting, the answer came to those standing without. There was a moment's silence, then there came a low rap upon the great door.

Alfred bent his head.

"My son," at the sound of the weak quavering voice Alfred turned pale, "will you not open to your father and an old man?"

Every vestige of color forsook the face of the listener within the room.

"My son, my son," the voice wailed, so close that it seemed to come from the very door itself, "turn me not away, but open, I beseech you, to an old man and your father."

Alfred stepped forward and unbolting the door flung it wide and stepped back.

The Emperor entered, leaning heavily upon the arm of Col. Miron.

The door swung to. Someone closed it. The four were alone; a strangely assorted quartette.

The aged Emperor, his proud, haughty spirit now bent, subjugated, weak and trembling; Col. Miron, staunch, grizzled, firm, a great beseeching upon his grim scarred face; the old colored man in the background, feeble, pathetic, faithful, with Alfred standing in the midst, pale,

startled, rigid, his splendid figure drawn proudly erect, defensive, inflexible, unyielding.

For a moment the dimmed aged eyes of the Emperor looked beseechingly into those splendid glowing orbs that now burned with a dark smouldering light.

"My son! My son!" said he, as he stretched out his arms in pathetic appeal to that silent, rigid figure. "Do not leave me, I pray you, do not forsake me. I am an old man and broken; I have no one to lean upon. You are my son; mine! You belong to me. You cannot leave me like this." The voice of the older man broke into a weird wail. "You will not leave me like this!"

The face of Alfred Raymond became white and drawn with pain.

The Emperor never removed his gaze from that handsome face before him. Col. Miron watched him with a fierce, intense longing in his sharp, piercing eyes, breathlessly waiting. Only God and himself knew how he desired this man for his Prince and master.

The old colored man, with all the dumb devotion of a dog, watched that splendid face that seemed as if frozen with pain and agony.

Alfred Raymond had come face to face with the crisis of his life. Almost it seemed as if his soul were being rent in twain.

All the love for her, the land of his love, his home, was drawing, drawing with a terrible, almost irresistible force. The old black face, from out of which was looking all the years of misery, longing and despair, was now bent upon his with such a look of dumb agony that a low moan broke

from his lips; a moan that sounded almost like a sob through the great, luxurious room.

He wanted to go, to fling off the chains that bound him; to be free. And almost he had gained that freedom, but suddenly he found himself more firmly ensnared than before; and in this room. What was it that caused his blood to chill, the cold perspiration to break out all over his body?

An unseen, powerful presence seemed to be coming nearer, nearer, a presence he felt that would completely conquer and hold him.

He tried to break away, to throw it off.

"My son, my son;" again that wailing, broken voice of the Emperor.

Alfred shook his head. Slowly he gathered himself together for the last great struggle.

Suddenly the Emperor dropped the strong, supporting arm of Col. Miron and staggered forward to the great mirror. His frenzied, wavering hands caught at a heavy cord that hung there which he pulled with desperate energy.

The great rose-satin drapery rolled back.

Quickly he rushed across to another opposite and pulled it in like manner with the same result.

Alfred, who had watched his movements with wonder, now lifted his eyes toward the great panels; before him there seemed to rise a mist.

Something flung itself at his feet and clasped him close around the knee; he scarcely felt it. His splendid great eyes were striving to penetrate the veil before him.

Again he felt a presence, a presence that seemed slowly to be mastering him.

Then from out the dim, filmy mist, there slowly appeared a form and a face. A face so like his mother; only this face was a thousand times more lovely, more tender. Those great, luminous brown eyes seemed to glow and burn with a deep celestial light; a look of radiant love and beseeching upon that beloved, glorified face.

He stretched out his splendid arms with all the pathetic entreaty of a child.

“Mother! Mother!” The words broke from his lips freighted with loving tenderness.

The face seemed to smile, then the form began to recede; slowly it seemed to dilate and grow taller. Farther, farther, until it rested against the panel beside the great gold-framed mirror. The dazzling, filmy drapery began to take on an ivory-white hue; the beautiful loved face began to grow dim, and disappear, and another face, crowned with pale, golden hair, and lit with grand gray eyes, slowly came into view.

With arms still outstretched, he stood as if petrified.

A leaden weight seemed to have bound him to the place where he stood.

The watchers stood breathless.

What was this? Who was this with face so like his own?

Up there where he had seen the form of his sainted mother recede and disappear, now appeared the face and form of a woman lovely beyond compare.

But the face! The face was so like his own, and for a moment he wondered if it were the face of the man standing here or the pictured face upon the wall.

There was a slight movement at his feet, and turn-

ing his wondering eyes away he saw his own reflected form and features in the great mirror. The handsome face; the grand, golden-gray eyes, the waving, gold-brown hair; then his gaze went back to the picture of the woman clad in ivory white. The beautiful, fair face, a perfect counterpart of his own, with the same grand, golden-gray eyes, and crowned with pale, golden hair.

Slowly his outstretched arms sank.

What did it all mean? His heart and body felt numb.

Where was the mother who had appeared as from the dead and then had vanished? Who was this woman with face so like his own who had taken her place?

"My son, my son," the voice seemed to come from his feet "Do not leave me! I pray you do not forsake me, but let the pictured face of your dead mother plead for me. I know that I am all unfit, all unworthy, but you are mine; hers and mine. Charlotte! Charlotte!" The voice of the Emperor rose in a bitter wail as he lifted one hand toward the picture of the dead Empress. "Plead with him for me, your son and mine, that he leave me not; I cannot let him go. He is yours, he is mine; I know that I am all unworthy, but I want him; I want him." The wavering voice ended in a broken sob.

Alfred looked down and was inexpressibly shocked to find the Emperor kneeling at his feet and clasping him close about the knees.

Col. Miron in the background looked upon the picture before him, breathless.

To the left of the great mirror hung a life-sized portrait of the Emperor, made more than thirty years before; to the right hung the portrait of that beautiful Northern

Princess, Charlotte of the North. Reflected in the great mirror was the form of Alfred Raymond, the son of that pitiable union, and kneeling at his feet, clasping his knees in close embrace, was the mighty Emperor Paul, ruler of the greatest empire in the world, supplicating, spent, broken.

"Look! Look" wailed he, stretching out his hand again. "Look into the face of your mother, and let her plead for me, my son, plead for my forgiveness."

"Into the face of your mother." Alfred looked into the pictured face of the young, beautiful Empress.

Slowly the meaning of those words sunk into his brain. "Into the face of your mother." This, then, was the mother who bore him. The chosen instrument in the hands of the Divine Father to do His will. What was that? Did the pictured face smile? Into the eyes that were looking into his own there seemed to come a look of great beseeching, of great tenderness, of great love.

A wonderful presence seemed to be near; about him; it caught him; it held him; henceforth there was to be no escape; he was bound now, body and soul.

Lower crouched the aged form of the Emperor at his feet. Lower, slowly lower until the face of the father lay upon the floor at his very feet.

"Through him I will strike you as you have stricken me. I will break you as you have broken me. I will lay your face in the dust as you have laid mine in the dust."

The prophecy of the Empress had been fulfilled and the face of the mighty Emperor Paul lay in the dust, praying for pardon at the feet of the wife and son he had so foully wronged and outraged.

"Rise, I beg of you," said Alfred, leaning down and touching him gently.

But the crouching figure at his feet only sank lower. From the ground came to him this plea, "Not until you have forgiven me, my son, forgiven me for her, all the wrong I did her and you. My face is bowed, bowed to the earth, and can never again be lifted, unless you will lift it up with your forgiveness and pardon; unless you, my son, will promise me that you will not leave me nor forsake me in mine old age."

Alfred seemed turned to stone.

Sounding as through a hollow, echoing room he heard the words he had heard before so often; "Oh, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Why could not the great Son of God avert the agony and trial hanging over him? He had often wondered. Now he understood, for he too, knew the agony. He lifted his eyes to the pictured face of his mother; how strangely that thought came to him.

The mother who had reared him. He remembered her and all she had been to him; with a pang he recalled every memory of that dear one; all the love, all the tenderness, then all the agony and the loss.

Then that last wonderful vision of her, when it seemed almost as if she had returned from the grave to give him back again to the mother who had borne him. He was looking into that beautiful face, that face so like his own; it seemed almost he was looking into his own face and all the truth, all the honor, all the manhood in him arose. The path before him grew plain; his duty became suddenly clear. A wonderful light seemed to come into the grand

gray eyes that were looking into his, and irradiate the whole face.

For a moment he gazed with wistful longing, then, "My mother!" broke in low, thrilling accents from his lips.

Bending down and putting his strong arms about the crouching, bending form at his feet, he lifted him up and said, as he held him closely clasped to him for a moment, "I forgive you, my father, even as I hope that God, for Christ's sake, will one day forgive me."

"And you will not leave me?" said the Emperor, as he put his hands upon the shoulders of his son and pushed himself back so that he might look into that handsome face above him. "You will not leave me? You will stay with me?"

"I will not leave you; I will stay with you," said Alfred, gently.

"Thank God! Oh, thank God!" ejaculated the Emperor.

"Amen and amen!" fervently responded the low voice of Col. Miron.

The Emperor staggered back and would have fallen had not Alfred sprung forward and caught him; he was weak and spent; his strength seemed almost gone. Col. Miron hurried forward, and between them they supported him to a couch.

They would have summoned assistance, but he stayed them. After a little he asked to be taken to his own apartments. A little later Alfred was alone.

Going over to the great mirror he studied the pictured face of the Emperor, and again he could trace the resem-

blance between that proud, haughty face and his own; then he turned to the picture of the Empress, his mother, a world of longing and tenderness in his eyes.

He had heard and read the story of the Divine Son of God, who had left his Heavenly Home to dwell upon earth, but could not quite understand why, if He were the Divine Son of God, He had chosen the shameful death upon the cross. He had the Divine power, why could He not have saved Himself? All of this he had not been able to quite understand.

But now, standing before the pictures of his father and mother, the Emperor and Empress; himself the acknowledged Crown Prince and heir to the mightiest empire in the world, there came to him suddenly a revelation of his true position.

Far, far back in the past, ages and ages ago, the people of this land had selected its supreme ruler from his father's house. He had accepted the position to which they had elected him; and in accepting that position, had also taken upon himself the responsibilities which he had pledged to assume not only for himself, but also for all who would come after him. So as generation had succeeded to generation, had the Imperial succession been handed down from father to son, until it had come to his own father, and in time must come to him.

It was a thing over which he seemingly had no control whatever, for he found himself in a position where he must do the best he could, with what he had to do with.

"By the hand that would have wrought you the greatest harm He has brought you the greatest good."

Those wonderful words of Friend Nathan Arnold.

He saw it all. The truth of them came home to him now with irresistible force and meaning. Now he understood the years of preparation and training received at the hands of that wonderful mother who had trained him, as he understood the call to the mother who had borne him.

Now he understood his own renunciation; why he must be more than a singing, echoing voice. While this great nation had been sinking farther and farther away from its Great Creator, and from its Divine right to be a nation of and for the Highest, God had been preparing him a man, by the hand of woman, whom, when the time should come, He would call to lead this captive people from captivity and darkness into freedom and light.

And to that end he must have "No other Gods before Me," so must he renounce all and "take up his cross." And now Alfred Raymond stood face to face with that cross and understood why he must bear it, having no other desire apart, until at the end it would lift him up, up, up to the Divine Kingdom, the Kingdom of God, and love.

CHAPTER XXI

The events of the past days and weeks had transpired with such rapidity and quick succession, that the minds of all with whom they had come in contact, or who had been more or less influenced by them, had been reduced to a state of greater or less bewilderment, leaving few fully alive to the real situation.

The peculiar and complex position of Alfred Raymond as Crown Prince of Carona, and as supposed American citizen, had not yet unfolded itself. The strangeness of it was not yet fully realized.

Born the direct and only descendant of an Emperor, who in turn was the descendant of a long line of Emperors who had ruled with unlimited and despotic power for a thousand years and more, his mother a Royal Princess, daughter of a long line of Kings; made royal by a line almost as long as time itself, he had been taken from the land of his birth and nativity, and all of its surroundings and influences, at his earliest infancy, almost, it seemed, before its breath could enter into his nostrils to give to him the little of the life-giving virtue it still possessed, and had been carried away to that new land of the West, from the old world of the East, with its worn and almost spent energies, its nearly devitalized life, and thrust into that fresh, new, and invigorating life of the West, where one draws in with every inhalation the marvelous vitality that is the life of the atmosphere itself, which had changed him into an entirely new being.

The wonderful life of that new, rich land, breathed in with every breath he had breathed, absorbed by every contact into which he had been brought, when placed in that land, had so impregnated his whole being, and had so become a part of him, that never more, so long as time would last, would it be separated from him; in fact, it had become the real and genuine part of him.

Then having had born into him all of the wonderful virtues of his noble, sainted mother, and having been placed so unrestrainedly into the hands of a woman of the nature and character of Margaret Raymond, who had trained every noble and lofty trait until she had developed it to the utmost degree, had seemingly succeeded in eliminating every particle of the wretchedly detestable and barbarous character descended to him from his father's house.

Living in that noble, free land of the West, almost, one might say, from his very birth, absorbing her wonderful liberty, equality, and freedom in every fibre of his being, he had come to adore her with a passion that was second only to the love he bore her whom he called mother; a passion that at times bordered almost upon idolatry.

And did she not deserve all his great love and admiration, for had she not helped to make him all that he was and had been to-day?

The desperate fierceness with which he had resented the information as to his real identity and position, had seemed only natural.

The ease with which he had met the trying ordeal of meeting his father for the first time, even though carried out by the Emperor in that unnatural and barbarous manner, and the grace and dignity with which he had extricated him-

self from that complicated situation, had seemed only reasonable and right.

Alfred Raymond, as we have said, born of royal parents, made royal by birth, removed from every possible contact or influence of that royalty that was his by right of birth and succession, placed in a land and among a people whom it seemed God Himself had been pleased to make truly royal, every truly noble, truly royal impulse and virtue developed to the fullest, he, without a syllable of preparation or warning, found himself torn with almost lightning-like rapidity from that true nobility, that true royalty, and flung back into the land of his birth and nativity, a land that to him was the most alien of the alien, into the midst of a nobility and royalty that was almost dead of its own rottenness and decay.

Torn from the land he named in agony, "My Land, My Country, My Home," he found himself suddenly placed in the midst of the land that was in reality his by birth; His Land, His Country, His Home.

For a time his overwrought mind must have felt that for him there was no place at all; that for the sole of his foot there was no rest to be found on land or on sea; in Heaven or in Hell. And surely, could one enter into the situation, no more pitiful or painful one could be found.

Separated from that most extreme and conservative court of his birth, reared in the most extreme reverse, returned to the former and entirely unknown situation, could anything greater be conceived? Can mortal mind really comprehend it? Can greater extreme be imagined?

What would the outcome be? Where indeed would the man find His Land, His Country, His Home?

Some such thoughts as these passed through the mind of John of Ainhault as he rode swiftly along through the deepening shadows of the departing day. Though the sun was sinking in the west, all about was bathed in a glowing, rosy light.

Hope was again singing a glad song in his heart. "And now I return to the land God and she gave to me." Those words still rang in his ear and thrilled him through all his being when he remembered that he had cast in his lot with this man Alfred Raymond; he had sworn fealty to him as prince and master; for him he had renounced home and country; he had pledged himself to bear part and companionship in land, destiny and God. For him he had forsworn all.

Ah, was it for him?

A soft, luminous light dwelt in his eyes; a tender smile played across his fine face as he recalled that in that land, that distant land of the West, there dwelt a woman, to him beautiful beyond compare. A woman with fair golden hair and eyes of a deep, velvety blue. A woman for whom he would deem the world well lost, could he but win her for his own. And so, with this man he would journey to that marvellous country, there to mingle with those wonderful people, to become one of them, and thus attain to the highest and noblest.

The subtly invigorating vitality of that land had already penetrated his being, and like an essence of new, revitalized life was stirring him to his innermost soul with its strange and fascinating power. And doubly impelled by the memory of that exquisitely fair face that had flashed meteor-like across his life, he became insensible to all his surroundings and the difficulties of his position.

So, lost in rosy dreams of the future, he sped on his way toward Castle Ainhault, where the Archduchess Miriam waited with an almost feverish impatience for his coming, to hear from his own lips the outcome of that inhuman and barbarous interview ordered by the infuriated Emperor Paul, for his unwelcome and unhappy son.

Knowing the Emperor as she did, with his uncurbed, unrestrained temper, his almost inhuman disposition to utterly crush all who opposed or offended him in any way, she saw but one outcome, and that was the utter overthrow and annihilation of the unfortunate son upon whose innocent and unprotected head he had planned to vent all his devilish, vindictive spleen.

That any man could successfully pass through such an ordeal as he had prepared for this man, did not once present itself to her, particularly as among those present there was not one whom he, this man, could possibly rely upon to uphold or sustain him, no matter what might transpire; and she could scarcely suppress a shudder as she tried to picture the result of the interview of which she felt she knew only too little, as told to her in the few broken, agitated words of her son.

Unable to restrain her unrest longer, she slowly descended the splendid marble stairway and made her way through the great hall to the entrance.

Exquisitely clothed lackeys drew open the leaves of the door and saluted as she passed through, with almost unseeing eyes, to the magnificent stone portico beyond.

Long and silently she stood and looked with earnest, strongly concentrated gaze across the widely intervening space that lay between, to the magnificent royal palace of the

Emperor, and strove to picture in her mind the scene she knew was being enacted there; but no thought came to her; no faintest suggestion even presented itself to her. Her mind seemed almost to have become a blank.

At last roused from the deep abstraction by the sound of a horse rapidly approaching, she turned to see her son, John of Ainhault, riding swiftly toward her through the early twilight.

Throwing the reins to a groom, he passed quickly up the steps to meet her.

As he approached nearer and saluted her, she almost reeled from the place where she stood at the look of radiant joy that illuminated and seemed to transfigure his fine face.

She had been distressed almost beyond endurance, and had prepared her to meet almost anything that should come in the form of defeat, even ruin itself, and now the look she met nearly overwhelmed her.

"Tell me, my son!" said she, "tell me what means this look of great joy that I see upon your face? When you left me, the look I saw there was of one who goes to look upon death itself and my soul has agonized in torment all the day; when, lo! you return to me and your look is of one who has looked upon the Elysian fields themselves. Tell me," said she, giving his arm a little shake, "what means this great and wondrous change?"

"A glimpse of Elysian fields, my mother?" said he, looking into her face, "a glimpse of Elysian fields, say you? Aye, and more, for the gates of Paradise have opened to me. A Paradise from the gates of which a woman, more beautiful than Clotho herself, stands and beckons me to enter. But come within with me; I have a tale to relate, my

mother; a tale the equal to which it seemeth me was never yet spoken by mortal lips."

He conducted her to her private apartments, and seating her upon a divan, he went over and taking his place near the hearth, began his tale.

"As I said to you last night, the Emperor arranged to have his son brought before him in the great throne room. The Imperial Guard, the Emperor's own company, in full uniform, with Col. Miron in command, were drawn up along the east wall; the Crown Prince's company, myself in command, were stationed along the west wall; Admiral Sefton with the Marines, the south wall. The Emperor, arrayed in all his royal robes, was seated upon the throne, while surrounding him upon all sides were all the high dignitaries and ecclesiastics, in all their brilliant dress and regalia. I yet have never looked upon a more imposing sight.

"At promptly three by the clock in the tower, the great golden doors of the throne room were thrown open and Alfred Raymond was conducted within and left standing just within the line of the Marines upon the open floor, alone.

"Strict orders had been given that not a man present should even look upon him, the Emperor's supreme idea being to embarrass and humiliate him beyond human endurance."

The Archduchess leaned slightly forward, her hands tightly clenched, listening intently.

Where her overwrought brain had refused to picture the scene she so desired, now, as portrayed by the words

of her son, she saw all with startling distinctness, only, the face of the man Alfred Raymond was hidden.

"After announcing the man as 'His Royal Highness, the Crown Prince Alfred,'" continued the speaker, "the silence was intense. No one spoke. How long we stood thus, I do not know; but, suddenly, after what seemed an interminable length of that painful silence, he, Alfred Raymond, strode up the length of that great room and stood directly before the throne. The silence was most impressive. Long while he seemed to be studying the features of the man who sat there. At last he spoke ——"

"He spoke!" exclaimed the Archduchess. "Without being addressed by the Emperor?" She grew slowly pale; her mind filled with fear.

"Yes," was the reply.

"And his words were?"

"The simplest and most comprehensive of any I have ever heard."

"Tell me," said she eagerly, "how dared he speak without being first addressed by the Emperor? What did he, what could he say?"

"Calm, courteous, polite, he said, 'You have sent for me? You wished to see me? You will tell me what you want of me and I will go.'"

"He said that?" exclaimed she. "And the Emperor ——?"

"Nearly went mad with rage. 'You will do what?' Said he. 'You heard all that I said,' was the reply, 'and there is no need for me to repeat.' A vile imprecation rose to the lips of the infuriated Emperor, while every man present was stunned by what had already taken place, when

this man stayed it, and then out rolled such a torrent of indignation as methinks never yet was spoken by the tongue of man. His voice, cold and clear as purest steel, sharper than any two-edged sword, cut into the black and filthy life of the man before him until not a vestige of manhood was left upon which he could rest.

“With a skill that exceeded cunning itself, he unfolded the life of the man upon the throne until it hung out in the pure white light of truth, in the sight of all, fairly dripping with foulness and bestiality, and the shame was, that every word he uttered, every act he portrayed, was truth itself. Yes,” said John of Ainhault, as he dropped his head with shame; “the filth of my father’s house was uncovered, and its stench, methinks, will never leave my nostrils more.”

The Archduchess turned her face aside to hide her emotion.

“The Emperor,” said he, after a short pause, “seemed paralyzed. Never before had man dared to stand before him. Never before had any man dared to show him to himself as he really was, for the words of this man swept away every possible chance of evasion or palliation from him and left him absolutely condemned and damned.

“‘Look into my face!’ said he; and his voice rang out like a trumpet. And Paul, the Emperor, sank back against the throne with a low cry, for the face before him was the face of the son of her whom he had so foully wronged and betrayed years before. Almost, methinks, he must have felt that he was looking into her own face.

“Could the Emperor have spoken, methinks his cry would have been, ‘Mountains, cover me! Seas, hide me!’ For the picture was appalling. And still that voice stayed

not until it had searched and swept the whole life of the man. Then from out of that blackness and filth, from out of that wreck and ruin, he caught the golden key that gave back to him his liberty and freedom."

The Archduchess sat spellbound by the terribly wondrous recital. Almost she seemed to have become lifeless; all of her anxiety had disappeared; all of her unrest had ceased. She was hanging upon every word, every syllable. He was going on.

"And yet, to your contemptible smallness, I must acknowledge myself grateful; for by every act, every word of yours you have satisfied me wholly that you are not my father and I am not your son, for which I say reverently and gratefully, I thank God! And again I thank God!" said he.

"Listen, my mother," said John of Ainhault, his voice swelling deep, full and resonant, "listen to the grandest tribute ever paid to woman, in the words of Alfred Raymond, Crown Prince of Carona and heir to the greatest empire in the world! 'I believe myself to be, by the grace of God, the son of her, Charlotte of the North, and by the hand of God, the son of her, Margaret Raymond, the grandest and noblest woman that ever lived upon the earth. For in those words I believe is embodied woman's true heritage. The heritage of the purity of true wifeness. The heritage of the nobility of true motherhood; her true heritage, the power to create the holy sacredness of home.'"

"And then?" said she, breathlessly.

"Then," said her son, "he, Alfred Raymond, spoke his ultimatum, 'And now I return to the land God and she gave to me; to the loving and beloved sister God and she have

given to me, and know you that in the pure love of the child of that noble woman I shall find such compensation as no dying, decaying dynasty upon earth can ever give. Trouble me no more. Farewell.' And turning, he strode down the great room; paused a moment in the great doorway, saluted and was gone."

"And the Emperor?" questioned she.

"There was but one Emperor there to-day," said he, "and that man was Alfred Raymond, fit to be the Emperor of the whole world, now lost to his own land forever."

"You mean?"

"That he will return to the land from whence we brought him. There is now no power on earth that can hold him, for Paul himself has severed the one and only tie that bound him to the land of his birth."

"But," persisted she, "how can he go? You yourself have said that he is the Crown Prince; he has acknowledged that he is the son of Charlotte of the North. He cannot go."

"My mother, you do not know this man, you do not know this people of the West, nor can I tell you of them, beyond that they are the most wonderful race of men under the sun to-day. We of the old world to-day, with all our boasted superiority, are but poor grovellers in the dust while they are dwellers upon the heights; heights to which we, bound down by all our old, worn laws and customs, can never hope to attain."

"My son," said she, coldly, "you speak not well of your country."

"While I was in ignorance," said he, "I spake as I had been taught; now that I have seen this land and met this people, my honesty compels me to speak the truth."

"My son," said she, "I confess I do not understand you; you speak in a strange manner; in a manner not at all familiar to you; your words are the words of a stranger and an alien."

"My mother, when I first returned to you I said that the old John of Ainhault was dead and that a new John of Ainhault lived, his life, his all, devoted to his new-found prince, and to-day, in the presence of that brilliant assemblage, I spoke my vow of eternal fealty."

"But, my son, you said that he, this man Alfred Raymond, would return to the land from whence he came. How then can you serve him?" She rose quickly to her feet and faced him, a sudden light flashing into her eyes. "Your words!" exclaimed she, "'To me the gates of Paradise have opened! A Paradise from the gates of which a woman fairer than Clotho herself stands and beckons me to enter.' What mean you? Before, you have spoken of a woman. This woman, is she also of this land? You have sworn fealty to this man, and he will return to this land of which you rave. Tell me of your vow. What have you spoken?"

Again that rapt look seemed to irradiate his face and to startle her by its intensity.

"My words?" repeated he.

"Yes," said she, almost impatiently. Just at that moment her eyes looked him up and down. She caught her breath as a startled look came into her face.

"Your sword! Your belt!" she exclaimed, as her eyes slowly widened with a look of affright. "You are in full uniform! How have you dared to appear without them? Where are they?"

"My sword is broken and with my belt lies at the feet

of the Emperor, my allegiance to him and my country being severed forever."

"John!" she screamed as she started forward, "are you mad? Like a poor crazed fool you prate of a paradise, of a wonderful woman; John of Ainhault, who has come to be looked upon as almost a celibate, who would scarcely look upon woman, now raves of a woman lovely beyond all women; talks of a vow. Tell me," said she, as, placing her hands upon his shoulders, she looked sharply into his face. "I am your mother, and I would hear this vow, I would know of this woman."

"You would know of my vow? You would know of my sword? I broke it and lay it with my belt at the feet of the Emperor when he himself severed the only tie that bound this man Alfred Raymond to his own land, for to him I said, 'I herewith sever my allegiance to my country and to you, for I go with this man, vowing to him that, his land shall be my land; his destiny shall be my destiny; his God shall be my God.'"

As he continued, slowly the color faded from the face of the Archduchess, leaving it cold and white.

"Your words, my mother, are indeed true, for love for woman, aside from the love he bears to his mother, has before never entered into the life of John of Ainhault. But now a woman, fair as the dawn, pure as the snow, has suddenly entered my life and for her I would forfeit all that life holds dear, could I win her for my own."

"And this woman?" said she, coldly.

"Is Margaret Raymond, daughter of the woman who made Alfred Raymond all that he is to-day, and the woman who delivered him, a sacred charge, into my care and keep-

ing, and to whom I would soon render a faithful and happy accounting of her trust."

Miriam of Ainhault never faltered, for well she knew that the man before her was not to be dealt with as a child; well she knew that he was his father's as well as his mother's son, therefore, whatever she did she must do carefully and well. Quickley she gathered her forces and arranged them for the battle she knew was to come; and so to that end she determined to strike quickly and deep.

"You say you love this man, that you love this woman, and yet, like a deadly serpent, you would strike him through the sister whom he idolizes, and degrade the woman whom you say you love by making her your mistress."

Low, level and deadly was the tone she used, and the force of her words fairly staggered him, and for a moment he reeled and his face became livid.

A dead silence rested between them, then slowly he pulled himself together, realizing that before him was a struggle, a struggle even unto death. The words of Alfred Raymond were still ringing in his ears above the voice of his mother. "Was it love that prompted that black crime?" At the remembrance of those words he drew himself up proudly to his full height, and returned the cold, icy look of his mother with such a look of deep solemnity that her splendid courage began to falter.

"My mother," said he, and his voice thrilled with a tone of sadness, "God indeed forgive you for such a thought, for if Margaret Raymond comes not to me as my lawfully wedded wife before God and man, then John of Ainhault goes unwed and childless to his grave."

The Archduchess struggled hard to retain her com-

posure as she thus suddenly found herself face to face with the struggle, with maternal love upon one side, and a tradition as long, almost as time itself, upon the other, yet she held herself steadily and well in hand as she replied, "Is it necessary for me to say to you that the princes of the royal houses of Carona and Polen do not wed the daughters of American farmers?" Her voice was low and bitter; then she added, "A prince may love where he will, but he can marry only where he must."

"Man's words," replied her son. "Only man's words." Then he roused him up suddenly. "Who is man, and what are his laws as set over against the Divine law?"

"The Divine law!" exclaimed she. "What do you mean?"

"'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh,'" was the deep, solemn reply.

"Your words——" said she.

"Are from the Divine Word itself, and I, my mother, do scarcely need to remind you of whom they were spoken; and if God himself pronounced such approval upon His own handiwork, has He changed in this our day and age? And will you say to me that He does not set His Divine approval upon His works of to-day as He did in the Eden of long ago? You are my mother, and a good woman and I would ask you to answer me this. The Holy Word says that 'He is the same yesterday, to-day and forever; you believe in Him.'"

Involuntarily she bowed.

It was not a question, it was an affirmation from which

she saw no way of escape. All of her plans began suddenly to totter. Only tradition seemed to hold, so she grasped it firmly, but as he continued she felt her hands becoming loosened from their hold upon even it.

"And, believing in Him and His Word, will you tell me that He has changed, and that man-made laws have superseded His? If you will tell me that He is changed, that the truth of that day is a truth no more, that man's laws are the only sure and safe laws to follow and trust, then John of Ainhault will add his voice to the cry of the present age: 'Away with the old, bring forward the new.' If you will tell me this then I —— yes ——" said he, after a pause, "I will yield even my love for this woman who is life itself to me."

"But the traditions of our house," said she, trying to evade his question.

"Traditions of our house," said he, "what are they? Listen, my mother, to the words of Alfred Raymond to the Emperor Paul: 'Who and what are you? A man-made emperor. Have you ever for one moment tried to realize the genuine loftiness and nobility to which this people have elected your house?' From that election our traditions have come. 'Have you ever esteemed the great privilege you enjoy at the hands of your God and Creator?' In that privilege our house has its source."

"He said that to the Emperor?" said she. "And what did he, Paul, say?"

"He answered not a word."

"My son, your words have smitten my soul and my tongue seems dumb. All of my woman's instinct and training cry out for the traditions and laws of my life that have

become as fixed as the laws of the Medes and Persians, but with only one blow you have shattered them, and I stand helpless amid the ruins. How or with what words shall I answer you? You say that you will go with this man, that his destiny shall be your destiny, his land shall be your land, his God shall be your God." She sank slowly upon a divan and letting her arms drop upon the velvet rest she added low and bitterly, "For Miriam, Archduchess of Ainhault and Princess of Polen, has borne and reared a traitor."

John of Ainhault caught his breath through clenched teeth. His mother had struck and the blow went deep. She was fighting, fighting desperately, and she felt that this was not the time to stop to weigh or pause to consider.

"My mother," said he, "Helen of Bayronne sold that beautiful body of hers for the position Henry, Prince of Hundreveldt, could give her; the law legalized that union, and the church sanctioned it; but will you tell me that that made it right in the sight of God? Your doors have been closed to him these many years; will you open them to him now? The circle of every great and respectable family has shut him out for long, long time, then think you she can with a legalized prostitution open those homes to him, and at the same time wipe out the stain from her own fair name? I scarcely think so. We affect to despise the unspeakable Turk who buys his wives, but wherein are we so much superior, for do we not traffic in women's bodies almost, if not quite as openly and as shamelessly as he? We send our ambassadors to a foreign court, and desire the hand and body of its daughter for the heir to our house that he may perpetuate our line, but how about

the heart? They, too, I suppose, may love where they will but can only wed where they must; and then the priest pronounces the Benediction after saying: 'Whom God hath joined together.'"

He stopped, and the silence was oppressive. Then he continued, low and intensely, "How dare we say, 'Whom God hath joined together,' upon that? It seems to me that God has very little to do with it. It seems to me that we have come to the time when we are saying that we can do without the Almighty God. We, that is our great corporations, and the monied men that compose them, are saying, 'We do not need You any more for we now have the brains, or if we have not, we have the money to buy them with, so we can get along without You, so to that end we appoint ourselves to be leaders in a Holy War, and become rulers of the whole world, and we will now proceed to set ourselves up in Your place, so You can step aside for us.'

"Then we build ships, great ships that will override every storm, every obstacle; they shall be absolutely unsinkable, indestructible. And so, to that end we call upon our brains and our money, and the great ship is built.

"Now, a snowflake is a very small matter; one rests upon the hand, a breath of air and it floats away; an atom of frost is infinitely less than a snowflake and yet enough of atoms of frost are brought together and the mighty iceberg is formed."

The Archduchess could not help but listen. She was being carried away from herself, while her son went on.

"The great ship leaves port laden with its precious

cargo of human lives. She will override every storm; she will surmount every obstacle; while the Book says He is All and in All. Then if He is All, and in All, is He not in every storm? Is He not every storm? So the great ship will override Him, Himself? Well, no storm rises but the great icefloe is there. Why at the psychological time? She does not rush upon it, not like an engine of destruction, but smoothly, silently almost, yet surely, she runs afoul the great obstruction and her own sufficiency, her own greatness, her own absolute perfection, compass her destruction. And God was and still is God.

“Mother mine, your words were bitter that said that Miriam of Polen had bred a traitor. But the great ship of state of this land of ours is rushing swiftly upon the destructive rocks of ambition, trickery and licentiousness, and would you deem it the act of a traitor to forsake an engine of self-destruction and seek to save that which might be made a life of usefulness and blessing? You have yet not answered my questions; I will still ask another.

“A prince, you say, may love where he will, but can marry only where he must. Did you, my mother, the proud, beautiful Miriam of Polen, marry only where you must, while you still loved where you would? And must John of Ainhault blush for a father’s sin and a mother’s shame?”

Like a flash the Archduchess sprang to her feet, her face white, her eyes blazing, her splendid form drawn rigidly erect.

“John, John! My son! What are you saying? What do you mean?”

“What do I mean?” said he, “I mean did you come to my father’s house and arms while your heart dwelt with

another, and did he receive you when his soul was joined in love to some one else's, so that to-day John of Ainhault is as Berthold of Rutheven, son of Mary of Rutheven?"

"Berthold of Rutheven," cried she shrilly, "Berthold of Rutheven is a ——"

"Bastard," said he interrupting her. "Let me say it for you, for the word sounds not well coming from your lips; but you have not yet answered to my questions. You surely do not fear to answer to the truth?"

The Archduchess drew herself to her full height, and an imposing, splendid figure she was, as she looked her son full in the face.

At the look he saw there, the heavy gloom of his face broke and a soft light played over the shadow that had rested there. Then she spoke. "When I wed John of Ainhault, I followed the dictates of my heart and wed where I loved," and her face became radiant with the love light that streamed from her eyes as she continued, "and I know that he loved me; and you, my son, are the child God gave to us, the child of a pure and holy love, so ——"

But suddenly she found herself crushed to the great heart of John of Ainhault, and her eyes became misty as she heard the deep, heartfelt ejaculation, "Thank God!" that came from his lips.

"Now I am answered," said he, "for now I know that the mother of John of Ainhault ——"

But the remark was not completed, for just at that moment there came a knock at the door.

Upon being bidden an attendant entered who announced that Col. Miron was below and desired to see His Highness, the young Archduke.

“Col. Miron,” said the young man, “bid him enter here.”

As the attendant withdrew, the Archduchess turned to her son and said anxiously, “My son, do you suppose this visit of Col. Miron has to do with this wretched affair of the Emperor?”

But before he could reply the door opened and Col. Miron entered and saluted John of Ainhault, bowed low as he touched his lips to the hand held out to him by the Archduchess who bade him be seated.

“You have come from the Emperor?” said the young Archduke.

“Yes, Your Highness,” was the reply.

“And His Majesty?” said the Archduchess.

“Is well and resting comfortably,” said Col. Miron.

John of Ainhault and his mother looked sharply at their visitor as the former said, “Well and resting comfortably, Miron? I do not quite understand you.” And now he noticed that Col. Miron seemed to be laboring under some strongly suppressed excitement.

“After the remarkable scene of this afternoon,” continued John of Ainhault, “I can scarcely comprehend how His Majesty can be resting comfortably; when I left him he seemed upon the verge of a complete collapse; since that time —”

“The Emperor has been with his son, and —”

“Has been with his son!” exclaimed both his listeners, as all three rose to their feet impelled by the startling announcement.

“Miron!” exclaimed John of Ainhault. “What do you mean by saying that the Emperor has been with his son?”

When I left the Imperial presence, he, the Crown Prince, Alfred Raymond, although acknowledging himself the son of the Empress, had repudiated the Emperor as his father, and so had declared himself free; free to return to the land from whence he had come."

Both the young Archduke and his mother were greatly excited.

Miron bowed. "True, Your Highness, but immediately almost, when the great throne room was emptied —"

"Emptied!" exclaimed John of Ainhault.

"Yes," continued Col. Miron, "almost at once all departed leaving the Emperor and myself alone. At first he seemed to scarcely realize all that had taken place, then gradually the full meaning of it all began slowly to come back to him and as the meaning of the words of the Crown Prince began to unfold themselves to his dazed mind, he suddenly woke to the full significance of the situation, and demanded to be taken at once to him whom he now for the first acknowledged and called his son."

"Miron!" said the Archduchess. "The Emperor now recognized him as his son and demanded to be taken to him? Not for a continuation of the scene that has already taken place? Where, oh, where will this wretched affair end?" cried she in deep anxiety.

"The end has already come," was the reply.

John of Ainhault caught the speaker by the arm as he said, "Miron! Tell us, tell us all that has taken place! Tell us what you mean by saying that the end has already come."

The excitement was intense.

"Will you not be seated, Madame? Sir?" said Miron,

bowing first to the Archduchess and then to her son. "My story, I fear, will go but slowly, and may take long."

Thereupon they resumed their seats and Col. Miron related the wonderful scene that had taken place between Alfred Raymond and the Emperor in the apartments of the Empress.

Surprise, astonishment, incredulity, followed each other in rapid succession as the picture was portrayed to them in bold, sharp outlines by the crisp words of Col. Miron. At first they were almost stunned by the recital. At last, the Archduchess, unable longer to restrain her overwrought mind, exclaimed, "At the feet of his son! Miron? This is unheard of! Almost unbelievable!"

"Madame," said he with a low bow, "had I not seen it with mine own eyes, I should scarcely have believed it! And, continued he," looking intently in her face, "Your Highness also remembers the words of Her Majesty the Empress."

The face of the Archduchess grew slowly white, as involuntarily the words, "I will lay your face in the dust as you have lain mine in the dust," fell from her lips.

"And they have literally come true, Miron?" questioned she, while John of Ainhault remained speechless with astonishment.

"They have. Your Highness," replied he, "for the face of the mighty Paul lay upon the very ground, praying for pardon at the feet of his son."

"And that pardon!" exclaimed John of Ainhault, "was it granted?"

"The Crown Prince's own words, Miron!" interrupted the Archduchess. "What were they?"

Both hung breathless upon the reply; every nerve stretched to the utmost, for upon that reply the destiny of so many rested, in fact the entire destiny of a great nation.

The two watchers were startled by the look of deep joy that irradiated the features of the grim old warrior as he, in a low, clear voice, repeated the words of Alfred Raymond. "I forgive you, my father, even as I hope that God for Christ's sake will one day forgive me."

"And you will not leave me? You will stay with me?" As he repeated the words of the Emperor, the scene came before them with startling distinctness, intensified by the reply of the Crown Prince, Alfred Raymond.

"I will not leave you, my father, I will stay with you."

The voice of Col. Miron ceased, there was no sound through the great, luxurious room.

The Archduchess sat motionless, her hands pressed hard against her eyes from which the hot tears were streaming.

John of Ainhault stood as if turned to stone. His own words were rolling back upon him with a terribly new meaning. "His land shall be my land, his destiny shall be my destiny, his God shall be my God." John of Ainhault had sealed his own doom. When he spoke that vow in the presence of that great company of men, impelled by his deep devotion to this man, moved by his mighty love for Margaret Raymond and her country, there had come to him no faintest intuition that he had bound himself body and soul to his own land, and irrevocably severed every bond that might help to gain this peerless woman for his wife.

When Alfred Raymond had refused to believe that he was the son of the Emperor, and heir to the greatest Empire

in the world, he, John of Ainhault, had wondered how any man could scorn such a fact. It had seemed to him that any man must welcome such information with unbounded delight. He could not understand why this man did not. Now he understood. Now he knew. He was passing through his revelation, and that revelation was ringing in his soul, in clarion like tones, the death knell of all his hopes.

Col. Miron looked upon that rigid, silent figure, and the soul of the old warrior agonized for the splendid young life before him, for he too had been in that land and had seen those people, and had come to know the sister of Alfred Raymond, and the grand old warrior had read well between the lines; and now he was compelled to stand silently by and watch that splendid great heart break, for Margaret Raymond and John of Ainhault now seemed as irrevocably separated as the East is from the West.

"Miron," the Archduchess shaded her face with her hand as she spoke, "you said that the Emperor was resting in his apartments and that the Crown Prince, after having acknowledged him as his father, had consented to remain. Did I understand you aright?"

John of Ainhault, hearing his mother's voice and question, waited anxiously for the reply.

"Yes, Your Highness, it is as I said," replied Col. Miron. "For after having conducted the Emperor to his own apartments, he, the Crown Prince, sent for me and desired me to accompany him here."

"Here!" exclaimed the Archduchess and her son in the same breath.

"Yes, Madame; yes, Your Highness," said he; he had been told of the words of him of Ainhault to the Emperor

and so he desired to see yourself at once," said he, addressing the young Archduke, "and also," said he, turning to the Archduchess, "he particularly desired to meet the mother of John of Ainhault, and the friend of his noble, sainted mother." Miron bowed low as he spoke.

"Where is he?" said the Archduchess as she rose from the place where she had been sitting.

"In the oaken room, adjoining the great salon below. He desired to wait there while I should relate to you all that had transpired between the Emperor and himself," said Col. Miron.

"Take me to him," said she.

John of Ainhault stepped forward and she laid her hand in his outstretched palm; Col. Miron bowed low and saluted, for Miriam, Archduchess of Ainhault and Princess of Polen, was a very great and gracious woman and greatly beloved and respected by all. In fact she was often looked upon as the mother of the future Emperor.

At the foot of the beautiful marble staircase she stopped for a moment in visible agitation. Then she asked to go on alone; John of Ainhault and Col. Miron coming on behind.

Thus proceeding they came about half way across the great salon, a room royal in its magnificence. There she stopped as the two men came and stood upon either side of her.

The doors of the oaken parlor rolled back and the figure of a man came through to meet her, and raising her eyes she found herself looking into a startlingly handsome face, lit with grand golden-gray eyes, above which clustered a mass of waving golden-brown hair.

For a moment she stood spellbound. The years seemed to have rolled back. Again she was looking into the face of that beautiful Northern Princess, Charlotte of the North.

She took a step forward. Her arms were held out as over the stillness of the great room her voice rang out with a glad cry. "Charlotte's son! Charlotte's son! Boy! Boy!" said she, using the old, familiar, endearing name Margaret Raymond had given him. "Welcome! A thousand times welcome to my heart and home!"

Back, dear reader; back with me. Let us close the door. Gently, Gently, Quickly, Quickly. Let us not intrude. Let us turn aside and pass on. Alfred Raymond was learning that hearts are hearts whether carried by royal prince or simple man; that love was love whether in farthest East or distant West. That he was slowly but surely coming into his own. His Land. His Country. His Home.

CHAPTER XXII

The excitement continued to grow. Up and down the streets of the Imperial city of Carodina the wildest rumors flew.

Rumors, rumors, rumors. No man could say from whence they came, but all could say where they found lodgment, for the minds of all were as open receptacles, eagerly grasping all that came within reach.

Rumors that came, rumors that went, rumors that grew as they went flying all abroad swiftly almost, as the light.

Whence came they?

Everywhere, nowhere.

Whither did they go?

The same reply; everywhere, nowhere.

They say ——

Who say?

Why everybody, nobody.

And so it continued until it seemed that the great city was almost in convulsions over the unknown uncertainties that had reduced the inhabitants to a state bordering upon frenzy.

“The death of the Crown Prince Raoul.”

“Ah! Call him not the Crown Prince; for thou knowest right well that he was Walther’s son.”

“Yes, Walther,” said another. “Had he not ought to be strangled in a ditch, or hanged upon the highest gibbet, for had he not brought all this to pass?”

“What for?” said a stranger who chanced to hear.

“Why, had he not stolen the son of their beautiful, beloved Empress away, and carried him to that new, wild land of the West and tried to put his own son upon the throne?”

“Yes,” said another, eager to be heard. “And had it not been found out when Raoul had been killed? And had not Col. Miron and John of Ainhault been sent to that far country to bring him back?”

“And they say that he came, a half wild man, for no man dared to cross him ——”

“Go to!” said the first speaker. “Who said he was half wild? Best curb thy tongue lest it bring thee into trouble.”

And so the words ran from mouth to mouth; and now the great reception was over. The great companies of the Imperial Guard, the Crown Prince’s company and the Marines had come from the palace, and a superb sight they were; but every man had been dumb. No man would tell aught of that scene.

In the Crown Prince’s company were some of Raoul’s close companions, but they, when questioned, had turned pale and had remained silent.

Yet there were strange rumors afloat. Rumors that the new Crown Prince had boldly confronted the Emperor and had refused to acknowledge him as his father.

Rumors that he had dismissed all of the attendants appointed to wait upon him.

Rumors that Prince Vladimer and the wild set who had been Raoul’s companions had been refused admission

to his presence, until 'twas being whispered about that the new Crown Prince feared to meet them.

As the latter rumor grew, Raoul's party began to take heart, for if the new man was so lacking in courage, he would become the easier prey to them.

At the time of the sudden death of Raoul, a new and powerful party had risen, headed by the old Count of Zetta, father of the beautiful young Countess of Zetta, who had striven by every means in his power to effect a union between his daughter and the Crown Prince, hoping to, in time, place her upon the throne as Empress and thereby, in time, get control of the Empire of Carona, and as Raoul was in every way playing directly into their hands, the success of their plans seemed assured when the death of Raoul completely checkmated them and left them crushed and helpless.

Upon the return of the rightful heir to the throne, they had remained passive, for they were as the rest, completely at sea.

Their inability to learn, with any degree of certainty, any details of the scene which took place in the throne room when the real heir had been brought before the Emperor, had succeeded in leaving them in a completely prostrate position.

The repeated refusals of the Crown Prince to allow any of Raoul's party to be admitted to his presence, had created the rumor of his supposed timidity.

But sooner or later he would be compelled to show himself, sooner or later he would have to come before them. Well, if he were as they said, it would be strange

indeed could they not find ways and means of still carrying out their plans.

And now this new rumor; 'twas being said all about that the Emperor had issued orders for a court reception and ball.

The word spread like wildfire. Instantly the greatest preparations began, for no one knew who would be bidden. Robes, the most gorgeous that gold could purchase, were ordered. The jewelers were simply overwhelmed with work.

An army of workmen were at the palace, almost transforming it for the occasion.

And through it all, not once had the Crown Prince been seen outside the palace walls.

Why had he not shown himself? Was it indeed true that he feared to be seen of or to see his father's people? His attitude was inexplicable. In fact, they were at a loss to discover any attitude at all.

One day, in the midst of the excitement, the liner *The Emperor Paul*, came into port, and before unloading her cargo, they led down one of her great gang-planks a superbly beautiful mare with a coat that shone like golden satin in the sunlight.

Coming out in the open square from the docks, she stopped, and lifting her beautiful head high, she threw back her splendid mane, like a cloud, and called. The ringing, clear call of the exquisite beast was almost indescribable; then she turned as if to listen, but no answer came.

What did she expect? In her poor, brute brain, did she think that some of her mates from that wonderful land of the West would reply?

The groom patted her gently and smoothed her silken locks, then she permitted him to lead her away. She was wonderful! Superb! She seemed all fire and life and air; she seemed scarcely to touch the ground, so light and elastic was her step. Many an eye turned and looked longingly upon her.

They went toward the palace. Twice she stopped and the groom waited when she lifted up her exquisite head and sent out that clear, ringing call, waiting each time as if for a reply; still no reply came.

Alfred was standing upon the stone balcony beneath the great windows of the Empress' salon, when he heard the sound of horse's hoofs ringing up from the pavement. He turned to look, then gave a start of surprise. He leaned forward, his hands grasping the stone balustrade tightly; his breath coming in sharp gasping sobs, for out there in all her exquisite beauty was standing Golden Betty.

He turned and walked quickly through the great salon to the corridor beyond. Hurrying along the splendid passage to the grand staircase, he ran down, his pace quickening as he went, then on through the pillared entrance to the great doorway, he passed to the massive marble staircase before the entrance; a staircase that would easily hold ten thousand men.

Coming to the front of the magnificent, balcony-like portico, he signaled the man to stop; then he spoke in a quiet voice, directing him to remove the bridle from the mare. The man looked in wondering surprise but made no move to comply. Alfred made a quick motion with his hands, whereupon the man loosed the buckles and remov-

ing the straps from the beautiful head the mare stood entirely free from all restraint.

Alfred ran down the great flight of steps and stopped at the bottom. His hand was in the pocket of the short coat he wore; he stood for a moment, then he whistled. The mare turned at that sound and trotted up the broad avenue toward him. She moved as if impelled by some wonderful force. Her action was perfect. In the sunlight her coat shone like polished satin. Her nostrils quivered and dilated; her eyes flashed and glowed; the light breeze tossed her silken mane and forelock like a beautiful veil.

Alfred held out his hand, upon it lay a white cube; he spoke, she came up with a glad, low whicker and rubbing her velvety nose against his arm, began to coax for the sugar.

He caught her beautiful head to him; as he encircled her exquisitely arched neck with his arms, and as his face lay against the satin smoothness of her, and the smell of her sleek, clean body filled his nostrils, it came to him as a message from the land he loved so passionately and which now seemed lost to him forever.

She came to him like a sweet breath from the plains of her birth with their wonderful, healing, life-giving virtues and his grand, gray eyes grew misty with tenderness and longing.

He fondled and caressed her as she crunched the sweets between her strong, white teeth, talking to her in a low voice, she rubbing her soft lip against his pale cheek, where a faint glow of color began to show.

She had come to him like a message from the past, the past that he had begun to feel was ended for him for all time. Yet, somehow, she seemed like a link that had suddenly appeared, and in some indefinable way disclosed the slender golden cord that still bound him to the past.

A new light seemed to burn within his eyes; a new look of hope replaced the sad, hopeless one that had dwelt there before.

The rising of this incident had sufficed to show him that the past still lived and that he was still connected with it.

After a little he bade the groom come nearer, and with his own hands he adjusted the straps and leads, removing the cards that were attached, which he slipped into the pocket of his coat, smoothing out the silky forelock, after which he directed the man to take her away.

He stood and watched until they had passed from view, then turning, he slowly retraced his steps to the Empress' apartments, his mind busied so that he did not see the magnificence through which he passed, nor was he scarcely conscious of the homage paid him as he passed along.

Upon regaining the privacy of his own apartments his hand unconsciously slipped into the pocket of his coat and touched the cards. He drew them out and looked at them almost idly; only a moment, and his gaze concentrated, his breath came quickly, all over him came those little, cold, shivery feelings.

What was it?

Only a small square of tough pasteboard, yet it wrought a startling change in the man.

(O) Shipped by
Henry Richards
to Alfred Raymond
Imperial Palace
Carodina
Carona.

to which was fastened a second.

(O) Received of
Peter VanDyke
\$153.00 One hundred and fifty three dollars
Article One sorrel mare
John Worrel
Ag.t.

Again he felt the warm, firm clasp of those strong hands, again their rich cordiality seemed to flood his whole being, the aloneness that had weighed him down, that had stifled him, was dispelled. God was still in His Heaven and all would be right!

And now the night of the Imperial Reception and Ball had arrived. Within the royal palace presented a scene that rivaled that of Aladdin's itself. The magnificent pile was ablaze with light from top to bottom; the immense sweep of the steps up to the great marble-pillared portico, which was now entirely enclosed in an ivory-colored covering, was brilliantly lighted, and from without presented a wondrous and striking appearance from the brilliant lights within, which gave it a marvelously opaline appearance.

Within the magnificently immense throne room the scene was one of incomparable brilliancy and beauty.

The Emperor, clad in black coat, white satin waistcoat and trousers that disappeared in glossy, black hip-boots, his breast ablaze with diamond-studded orders, wearing his splendid jeweled sword and belt, his head uncovered, looking more than ever Imperial, stood before the great ebony throne.

The Archduchess Miriam at his left and standing before the ivory throne of the Empress, appeared almost symbolic. Her robe of flame-colored yellow, from the folds of which tongues of living flame seemed to spring, was literally ablaze with diamonds and topaz, while the coronet above her stately brows seemed to be ablaze with living fire. She looked like life, aye, new life itself rising from the flames.

But it was upon the splendid figure at her left that the greatest interest was centered.

The excitement had been at almost breaking point; what would he be like, this new Prince of which so much had been said and yet so little was or had been known.

Of fact or detail there had been so little, in fact, now that they thought of it, none. Now they remembered that there had been no picture or resemblance formed in the mind. There remained only a blank.

In the spotless white uniform of the Crown Prince's company, as John of Ainhault, who stood beside him, he presented no striking picture except for the contrast with the gorgeously appareled figures of the Emperor and the Archduchess.

The great assembly that had been bidden had nearly all

passed the throne and each in turn had been presented to the new Crown Prince.

They had assembled eagerly, expectant, looking for, they knew not what, and then had come the presentation itself. They had looked into that startlingly handsome face, and then into those grand golden-gray eyes and over all had come that strange feeling of bewilderment, almost of awe.

Among them were a few who remembered the Empress and they were astonished at the wonderful resemblance.

Almost it seemed to them that the spirit of the mother looked from the eyes of her son.

Now from the half-bewildered but brilliant assembly there broke a low exclamation.

In the line approaching the throne was the black clad figure of a woman. Among the shimmering, dazzling robes of the others that one figure appeared with startling distinctness.

Her robe of deepest black was of rarest lace and swept away in splendid folds, which sparkled with innumerable points of finely cut jet. The corsage, low and sleeveless, displayed a bust and arms of creamy fairness and absolutely flawless. A fine network of cut jet enhanced the beauty of the arms that tapered away to hands that would serve as a sculptor's model. Above the splendid shoulders rose a neck round and firm as if chiselled from purest marble. The hair, black as midnight, was dressed high and gave in profile a singular Minerva-like look to the face, which was easily the most beautiful of any in that great assembly; the eyes, large, dark and full, seemed to hold immeasurable strength and purpose in their depths, but were now cunningly veiled by the long lashes that shaded them.

The face was oval in shape while the red lips between which the small white teeth showed were red as the heart of a crimson rose.

A low whisper. Something like a thrill, and then—
“The Zetta.”

The words seemed to come to the lips of every one present. No one spoke them, yet each seemed to hear them upon the lips of his neighbor, almost like a mental telepathy.

Meanwhile the woman was approaching the throne, now she was bowing before the Emperor, who was smiling upon her with a strange inscrutable smile.

The Archduchess Miriam was holding a bouquet of white orchids in both hands and acknowledged the salutation of the beautiful young Countess with a slight inclination of the head and an almost imperceptible raising of the brows.

“The Countess Zetta.”

The voice of the annunciator sounded with startling clearness over the great throng who were covertly watching.

Just at that moment the great mass of orchids seemed to slip from the hands of the Archduchess.

Quick as a flash Alfred flung out his right hand and caught the gold filagree holder as the beautiful mass slowly slipped adown the front of her robe, extending his left hand to the Countess whose knee touched lightly the velvet rest at his feet at the same time.

Then there ensued a slight pause.

Alfred still held the orchids. After an almost imperceptible pause the Countess spoke:

“Your left hand, Your Highness?” Her tones were honey sweet but back of them an intangible something that all who heard, felt.

“My left hand, Countess,” the tone was low; then after a short pause, “nearest to where my heart is.”

The grand golden-gray eyes were looking into the brilliant-flashing dark ones of the woman kneeling below them. At something she saw there, she carried the hand to her forehead and then to her lips, as she replied with a meaning smile, “Are the hand and heart then so closely allied, Your Highness?”

“Closely, Countess, and neither are far from the head,” was the cold reply.

The face of the kneeling woman turned white and for a moment the dark eyes blazed.

“Your pardon, Countess,” said he as he dismissed her. “Sir John,” to an aide who was standing near by, and who immediately came forward and taking the hand of the Countess assisted her to rise, while he turned his attention to the approaching line after having handed the orchids back to the Archduchess.

The Countess turned away almost blind with rage; never before had she received such an affront.

Being bidden, she had come almost exultant, for in the bidding from His Majesty, the Emperor, had seemed to have been embodied a desire to create a truce to the strained relation that had arisen over her great influence upon the Crown Prince, or supposed Crown Prince Raoul. For it was well known, and she herself knew that the Emperor was aware of her determination to wed the Crown Prince, and so come to the throne itself; and the struggle between herself, aided and abetted by her father and his powerful family, and the Emperor, had been fierce and bitter. When

Raoul came to his death the battle had suddenly ceased for herself and her party had immediately become powerless.

Upon hearing the rumor of the supposed timidity of the new Crown Prince, hope had again revived, particularly as she was one of the first to receive bidding to be present when the Emperor should first introduce his son to his people. For to her the act of the Emperor took on a form of mediation; so with that interpretation of the Emperor's message she had prepared her to try anew the battle that had seemingly been all but lost.

And now, at the very outset to have received such an outrageous affront.

Purposely she had delayed her arrival so that the great assembly of Carona's most brilliant and powerful people should witness anew her triumph; for that this man whom they had called weak and timid could possibly withstand her allurements, had not once occurred to her.

But instead he had humiliated her in the eyes of all. He had compelled her to salute his left hand. And all the world knew that the offering of the left hand was an open and public slight.

He had offered to her no word even of friendly greeting, but on the contrary he had dismissed her with almost a warning that head and heart and hand were closely allied. What did he mean?

She looked again at that superb figure and into that handsome face.

Why did her heart beat more quickly? She who had never been moved by any man. Why did she shiver as with cold? She who had never known fear.

They had deceived her. This man was no coward.

Here was no weakling. She looked past him to the Emperor who was watching her with that strange, inscrutable smile.

She looked away, she saw the covert looks, the significant smiles. She had been humiliated in the sight of all. Her rage grew; but beating it down with an iron hand, she turned with a smile to some of her companions just as at a signal from the Emperor a great burst of music, barbarous in its splendor, rent the air.

At that signal, a lady-in-waiting took the splendid bouquet of the Archduchess as she laid her hands in the outstretched hands of the Emperor and the Crown Prince, and stepped slowly down from the raised dais to the polished floor; pages in ivory white satin lifted the magnificent flame-colored court train, and moving forward she took the place for the opening dance, attended by the Emperor and his son.

Alfred, representing the Emperor, now took his place at the right of the Archduchess while John of Ainhault, representing the royal house of Polen, with one of the young Princesses took the position opposite. The cross positions being taken by Princes of two of the visiting royal houses with their Princesses, the royal set was complete; ladies and gentlemen-in-waiting were grouped about and back of them were gathered the great assemblage with the Emperor standing in the foreground, supported on the right by Col. Miron who represented the army and on the left by Admiral Sef-ton who represented the navy, both in full uniform.

The scene was unequalled.

The young and beautiful Countess of Zetta had been completely ignored in the arrangements of the royal set.

While Raoul lived, the preference he had shown her and her father's party had served as a means of influencing

many of the noble and powerful families of seeking to remain upon friendly footing with them, for many there were who believed that the party of the Countess would eventually succeed and all knew that as empress she would become a power to be seriously considered, with the possibility that in time she would succeed in gaining complete control over the rather weak and vacillating Raoul and thus obtain control over the entire Empire.

And so there had been more or less speculation as to what and how much influence this party of Raoul's would have over the new man.

Almost at once, in the event before the throne that had already taken place, they had been answered.

At the last court ball, Raoul, in taking the place of the Emperor, had arranged that the Countess was chosen by one of the visiting young princes, while Miriam of Ainhault had deputized one of her ladies-in-waiting to represent her as Raoul's partner, she refusing to countenance his preference for the young Countess.

The second slight offered to the young and beautiful woman, so openly, almost created a panic in the old Count's party, and burning with a fierce almost ungovernable rage, the Countess saw the ground slipping from under her, leaving her and her party almost, if not quite helpless.

For the time being she was completely forgotten and ignored, attention being centered upon the splendid, white clad figure moving through the stately figures of the dance with the Archduchess.

The royal dance was finished. The Archduchess had, with the Emperor, retired to the seats upon the dais. Alfred, with John of Ainhault, began to mingle with the brilliant

company that now took possession of the floor. The picture became kaleidoscopic in its rapidly changing brilliancy and beauty.

The half-wild strains of the semi-barbaric music seemed to entrance all with its peculiarly intoxicating power. A spirit of joyous revelry was abroad different in character and spirit from that which had characterized the former exceeding formal and ceremonious Imperial balls.

A new spirit that all felt yet no one stopped to analyze or question.

Suddenly out over the blare of brazen instruments, the tinkle of joyous laughter, there burst the report of a pistol. Within the confining walls of the room the sound was intensified a hundredfold.

Alfred whirled like lightning toward the direction from which the sound came.

Down upon the polished floor, upon one knee, was the black-clad figure of the Countess Zetta; towering above her, his left hand clutching her right wrist in terribly twisted position, his right holding his sword aloft as if to strike, his face white with rage, while before them upon the floor lay the still smoking pistol, stood Col. Miron.

About them a hundred swords were raised aloft as if to cut the woman to pieces.

Between him and the woman the Emperor was being supported in the arms of two aides, his face ghastly pale, a jagged hole showing in his white satin waist-coat from which a few drops of blood were slowly trickling.

Like a flash Alfred snatched his sword from the scabbard and sprung forward.

"Stand back!" he thundered, as he beat down the up-

raised swords before him. With one lightning-like blow he sent the upraised sword of Col. Miron clattering to the polished floor.

“Miron!” said he, “What does this mean?”

“An attempt was made upon the life of Your Highness,” replied Col. Miron, who had released his hold upon the woman; through the silence his words were distinctly heard through the great room. “The woman, crazed by anger and defeat, attempted to shoot Your Highness, when His Majesty flung himself forward and received the ball meant for you in his body.”

Alfred hurried to the side of the Emperor who was sinking heavily to the floor. Looking up into the splendid face of his son he gasped, “you — are — not — hurt, — my — son?”

“Quick!” said Alfred. “Carry him to his apartments!” Then turning to Col. Miron he said, indicating the woman, “she is your charge. I hold you responsible for her safety. If aught occurs, your own life shall pay the forfeit.”

The tone was cold and cutting as steel.

A murmur of protest arose.

According to the unwritten law of the land the woman should have been hacked to pieces.

At the sound those grand, golden-gray eyes swept over that angry, horror-stricken company, and the sullen murmur died away as quickly as it had risen; as you have heard a wind in the trees rise and as suddenly die away; like a wave that has spent itself upon the sandy, pebbly beach.

In that lightning-like flash, the assembled company recognized that there was but one master there, and that

man was Alfred Raymond, Crown Prince, son of the Emperor Paul and heir to the Imperial throne of Carona.

The great throne room was empty, the Imperial palace was silent. Dull lights only burned where all had been brilliancy before.

Sentries on guard stood silent and grim.

Attendants, soundless, flitted to and fro.

In the streets of the great city the people waited patiently for any message that might come from the apartments of the Emperor, where a desparate battle was being waged. A battle with the most skilled and best surgeons of Europe upon one side and grim, ghastly death upon the other.

As the first rays of light broke over the eastern horizon they looked long and earnestly toward that magnificent marble pile. They lifted their eyes above the great, pillared portico. A slight breeze stirred. A flag floated at half-mast.

The mighty Paul, Emperor of the greatest empire in the world, had paid his debt. He had given his life for his son. He could do no more. From the waiting multitude there went up a great sigh as each turned to his own dwelling.

Paul the Emperor they had feared and obeyed. But Paul the man who had given his life for the son of their beloved Empress, they revered and regretted.

But time, the great Physician, the great healer, the one mighty power in destinies, moved steadily on. He waited not on king or commoner, beggar or lord.

Paul was laid to rest with his fathers and the great wheels of state rolled steadily on.

The days of mourning were ended and on the morrow they would crown as Emperor, Alfred Raymond. For, "The King is dead: long live the King!"

CHAPTER XXIII

The great cathedral of Carodina was literally packed to its utmost capacity. The scene was the most gorgeous ever brought to the eyes of man.

Owing to the unparalleled circumstances accompanying the entire affair, the rulers of all the neighboring countries that were represented at the Imperial Court of Carona had insisted upon being present in person as far as was possible, so that each, with his or her retinue in full dress and regalia, seemed to present a more brilliant and dazzling appearance than those who had gone before as they were conducted to the position assigned them.

The Herculean task of arranging that gorgeous company had been accomplished.

Alfred Raymond, clad in white and gold, with the magnificent Imperial ermine-lined robe of ruby velvet clasped to his splendid shoulders, had been crowned with the matchless jewelled crown of the Imperial Carona. As he repeated the oath of allegiance that bound him to this, his father's land, there broke from the thousands of throats present such an acclamation as caused the great church to tremble to her deepest foundation.

At that sound, from the lofty tower boomed forth a single gun which announced the welcome tidings to the waiting people without.

Immediately from that almost numberless multitude a mighty roar of acclamation went up.

As the sound died away the great organ pealed forth

the national anthem, and at once the vast army of instrumentalists stationed above, joined and soon from all throats pealed forth such a volume of harmony as seemed to rock the massive walls.

As the last note died away within, from without was heard the familiar melody slowly receding farther and farther away in the distance; the effect was indescribable, inconceivable.

As the last note died away, Alfred the Emperor lifted the jewelled crown from his head and an attendant placed it upon its velvet cushion near.

Immediately eight pages stepped forward and lifted the massive Imperial robe as he stepped to the entrance of the chancel, then slowly down the nave of the church he went to the entrance where the great robe was removed, then out into the bright sunlight, carrying his visor upon his arm.

The Imperial Guard, with Col. Miron in command, quickly took their position at the head, a brilliant, glittering array.

The Crown Prince's company came next in line with an aide holding the beautiful sorrel in readiness. Quickly the Emperor passed down the great flight of steps and mounting, took his place at their head.

Amid the shouts of acclamation the great cavalcade formed and passed on its triumphant way through the beautiful streets of Carodina. The new-made Emperor, his head uncovered, acknowledged the plaudits of his people as cheer upon cheer broke from all sides.

Every available foot of space was utilized, balconies were crowded. Windows seemed fair bursting with hu-

manity, the house-tops all along the way were filled. Joyous, happy life was rampant everywhere.

Never before had the beautiful Imperial city of Carodina witnessed such a scene.

As the Emperor ascended the steps leading up to the pillared portico of the Imperial Palace, he paused and turned to look out upon the waiting multitude below.

Back of him was stationed the Royal Marines, against the deep blue uniforms of which his splendid white and gold clad figure stood out in striking contrast.

The Imperial Guard in scarlet and gold and black, were drawn up at his right along the outer rail of the great staircase from bottom to top.

The Crown Prince's company in white and gold and black were upon his left in like position.

Col. Miron, in the uniform of the Imperial Guard, stood at his right, John of Ainhault, wearing the uniform of the Crown Prince's company, was at his left, while Admiral Sefton, in full uniform, stood a little back from him. The perfection of arrangement seemed to have been achieved.

A great cheer that grew into a mighty roar went up from that great gathering of people.

Had he at last found his land, his country, his home?

But the wheels of destiny were moving silently, steadily, inflexibly on, for destinies wait upon no man, and we are all only parts of a whole. We each contribute our little, almost insignificant part, and the great whole moves on as if we had not been.

A few days after the remains of the Emperor Paul had been laid away in the splendid tomb prepared for the Imperial Rulers of Carona, and during the period of mourn-

ing imposed by the court, Alfred had, with John of Ainhaut and Col. Miron, mounted his horse and ridden through the city taking the way that led to the mountains where Raoul had met his tragic death only a few months before.

They rode unattended to the outer edge of the city where a groom awaited them upon a fine bay mount.

The man saluted and dismounted, then as Alfred took the reins, turned and took his way to the palace on foot.

As the three started forward at a rapid pace, Alfred driving the riderless horse by the side of his own, his calm, impassive face gave no clue to the errand upon which he was bent, to his companions who looked toward him with curious questionings in their glances. The summons to ride with him had awakened no particular thought or suggestion, although they had been somewhat surprised that he had suggested taking this road.

Along the broad highway the three rode at a rapid pace, so that in a comparatively short time they came to the more open upland which led to the mountain road. Along this they pursued their way at a more moderate pace.

As the road wound up the mountain side, the picturesque grandeur began to come into view, increasing in beauty and sublimity as they went.

At last Col. Miron reined in his horse and saluted as he said, "Your Highness, the place where Raoul went over is about an eighth of a mile farther on upon a small plateau like of the road, just before coming to a sharp turn."

At that Alfred asked them to wait while he fastened the bay to the branches of a tree that grew near to the side of the rocky road, then returning to his companions he rode slowly forward with them.

"Tell me, Miron," said he, "when we reach the exact spot."

Col. Miron bowed.

Alfred studied the road carefully as they rode forward but vouchsafed no information to their glances of concern.

The road now bore to the left upon an easy curve and out upon a short straight stretch where it hung like a shelf over the precipice several hundred feet high, before turning sharply to the left.

About midway Col. Miron drew rein and said, "This, Your Highness, is the exact spot where Raoul went over."

Alfred dismounted and handing his reins to Col. Miron, walked slowly to the edge of the cliff.

Carefully he studied the ground as if seeking to find some trace of the riders who had gone that way on that fatal day. His two companions watched him closely, but there was that same inexplicable something in that silent, almost mysteriously moving figure, near the face of the cliff.

What did this journey mean? Why had the groom been dismissed and the riderless horse brought on? Why this careful, almost minute scrutiny of the mountain road?

They could only wonder.

At last Alfred stepped quickly to the edge of the cliff and looked down; after a little he turned back and came to them, his face rather pale, his mouth set and firm.

Taking the reins from Col. Miron, he swung himself into the saddle with an ease and agility that caused his companions to open their eyes wide with astonishment, but before either could express the surprise he felt, he directed them to take their position a little farther along, their horses

turned toward the ascending road, also that whatever took place neither man was to change his position.

After they had taken the places he had assigned them, with their horses drawn closely up to the steep mountain-side, away from the edge of the cliff, with a broad passage between, he rode away down the road to where the bay had been tied.

Loosing the reins he stopped for a moment and stroked the horse gently upon the head as he murmured under his breath, "Poor fellow, poor fellow."

Turning about he rode back toward his waiting companions, the bay being between his own mount and the edge of the cliff.

When he came to the level curve he put the two horses to a slow canter, gradually increasing the pace so that by the time they had reached the straight piece of road they were running at a goodly speed. Both horses were now moving rather near to the cliff. Suddenly, just as they reached the point where the Archduke Raoul went over, Alfred turned his horse and, with whip and spur, drove him upon the bay with terrific force. The fearful impact threw the two horses apart as would a great steel spring. Alfred flung his horse back upon its haunches, throwing himself to the right at the same time with full force, which caused it to stagger nearer to the center of the road. The bay reeled to the edge of the cliff, where for a moment he struggled desperately to regain his balance.

A cry of horror burst from the lips of the watchers as Alfred flung the reins of the bay from him.

For a moment the bay poised upon the edge of the precipice, then with a frightful scream of almost human

agony he shot from sight. Scarcely a moment seemed to have elapsed when a dull, heavy thud betokened that all was over.

For a moment John of Ainhault and Col. Miron gazed at the ghastly face of the man before them with terror.

Had he suddenly gone mad?

Reining his horse back toward the inner side of the road he now sat in his saddle shivering as with an ague, his breath coming in long gasping sobs.

As he encountered the look of the two men before him he seemed to read the awful thoughts that were passing through their minds.

Controlling himself as quickly as he could, he spoke, although his voice trembled and almost broke.

"John of Ainhault, Col. Miron, you have seen how Raoul went to his death."

"Your Highness!" exclaimed the two men in the same breath. "You mean —"

"That the woman drove him over the cliff just as I sent that poor brute over." And he shuddered as he spoke.

Immediately the full meaning of the morning ride became clear to both men. Now they both understood why Alfred had refused to ride Golden Betty when she came to him that morning, but had chosen another horse instead; now they could see why the groom had been dismissed; so no tales could be carried. Also they were aware that the trip had to do with the young Countess, who was kept closely guarded, although they could not quite understand how, for in that land the Emperor was the supreme head of all, and when any man had suddenly and mysteriously disappeared, after having given some real or

fancied offence, all lips had become suddenly silent; no one questioned.

That he had some object in view both felt reasonably certain, but what that object might be neither could conjecture, yet both were learning that whatever it might be there would be no deviation from what he considered reasonable and right.

Turning his horse Alfred signaled his companions, and all three rode slowly down the mountain side.

Reaching the open country below they made a wide detour, and entering the city at a different point returned to the palace without creating any undue interest or curiosity.

On the morning following, before it was yet day, a messenger departed bearing a sealed message to the distant almost inaccessible mountains of Korenden.

Later, Alfred, sitting in a small semi-private room adjoining the great library, touched a bell; an attendant entered.

"Prince Vladimer is without?" asked he.

"He is, Your Highness," was the reply.

"Show him in."

The man saluted and retired; in a few moments the door again opened, when he returned, ushering in Prince Vladimer. As he retired two officers entered and stationed themselves upon either side of the door as it closed.

The Prince did not observe the men, his face being toward the occupant of the room as he entered.

Alfred motioned him to a seat before him, whereupon he seated himself with his back still toward the door.

"You received my message," said Alfred.

"I did, Your Highness, and hastened at once to comply."

"I appreciate the prompt response to my wishes," Alfred said, "as there are some points upon which I wish to consult with you."

"You flatter me," was the reply of the Prince, with a most ingratitating smile, "I shall consider it an honor to be allowed to furnish any information to Your Highness that I can."

Here was a most unexpected concession. At former times, when Vladimer and his party had endeavored to meet the Crown Prince, they had been met with a prompt and emphatic denial. Then, the night when they had been presented had seemed only to increase their bewilderment, for their very impersonal reception and quiet dismissal seemed to afford no clearer view of their position with the new man, while the shocking tragedy which followed had succeeded in seemingly to have hopelessly entangled all of their well laid plans.

Now to have been requested to wait upon the Crown Prince and meet with him in private conference was so unexpected and gratifying that he could scarcely repress a sinister smile of satisfaction.

"Prince," said Alfred, looking fixedly into the face of the man before him and speaking slow and clear, "would it be possible, if two people were riding together along an elevation at a rapid pace, for the inner man to suddenly hurl his horse against that of the other and dash him over the cliff to his death?"

When Alfred began speaking, Vladimer was gazing almost insolently into the face before him, but as the tone

changed and the question was brought to a quick sharp close, and the full import of the words came to him, every vestige of color forsook his face, leaving it white and ghastly.

“Your Highness, — I — did — not — see —”

Alfred Raymond was leaning far forward; his grand golden-gray eyes were flashing ominously into the terror stricken ones before him.

“You did not see what?” The words cut the air like a knife.

“I — did — not — see — the — man — go — over.” He was looking into those wonderful eyes and before he knew it the words were out.

The attack had been so sudden, the question so unexpected, that he was completely swept off his feet.

As the full meaning of the snare into which he thus found himself came to him, he made a desperate effort to recover himself.

Struggling to still the wild beating of his heart he tried to force a smile to his quivering white lips, as he said, “Your Highness is pleased to joke —”

“Silence!” thundered Alfred, “and hear me, Vladimir, I know how Raoul went to his death, and you know also.”

“Your Highness knows?”

The man was helpless, nor could he turn his gaze away from those eyes that seemed to be reading his very soul.

“The woman drove him over the cliff, did she not?” It was a question and a command.

“Yes,” was the gasping reply. In the hands of this

man, this man whom he had named timid and weak, he found himself as wax.

"Vladimer," said Alfred, his tones cold as ice, "the inner walls of the dungeons of Fort Philip they tell me do not make pleasant companions, and a too long and close contemplation of them has proven more than man's mind is able to stand."

The face of the listener was frozen with horror. His jaw dropped. His hands hung helpless at his sides.

"I have no wish," that voice was saying, "to go into details with you beyond that you have attempted to seize that to which you have no claim whatever. You have stopped at nothing to gain your ends; therefore it is but your own measure that will be meted out to you. The climate of Carona will not be conducive to your health, therefore you will be escorted beyond the borders of our land. The government of the country to which you journey will be notified of your arrival within its borders, also the nature of your malady. Should they conclude that they cannot entertain you, nor heal your disease, we will see to it that you are properly transported further, although I doubt me greatly whether any, other than yourself, can heal you of your disorders, and make you what you ought to be, a man."

The voice ceased. The man sat stunned, helpless.

"Guards," Alfred spoke again. The two men stepped forward and saluted. "You have had your orders, take him away."

They lifted him to his feet and led him, staggering like a drunken man, from the room.

The entire overthrow of the man had been quick and complete.

With an almost uncanny intuition Alfred had sprung upon the real facts of the case and all subsequent disclosures had borne out his suspicions.

The entire plot precipitated by the untimely death of the supposed Crown Prince was slowly being unraveled.

The coronation and all of its attendant train of forms and ceremonies, all its feasts and festals, was over; once more the wheels of state were moving around in their accustomed grooves.

The tragic death of the Emperor Paul was fast being forgotten; the woman,—well it were better not to speak of her, such speech was dangerous, and to that end they would forget her, and so they quickly dropped back each in his own place.

But they did not know that long before they had crowned the new Emperor, in the early morning, long before the break of day, a white-faced man, strongly guarded, had been escorted from the city's gates, and after traversing weary miles had passed from their borders into another land.

They did not know that after a, to him, seemingly interminable delay, a message had come from the King of that country saying that he would be unable to afford him any shelter, but would allow him safe transportation to a yet more distant land; and so his weary heart-breaking journey continued.

He had scoffed at the poor wandering Jew who could find no rest for the sole of his foot, who could call no land his home, no shelter his abiding place: had sneered and

branded it as a lie; now his own words had risen up against him and were questioning him in his soul, "whose were the lie, yours or theirs?" And in his inmost heart he knew. He was proving their truth.

A few days after the coronation the great state hall presented an entirely new and striking scene. A goodly number of Carodina's most powerful and influential citizens were gathered together upon one side of the room. Upon the other were seated an equal number of the standard merchants and business men of the city.

A feeling of suppressed excitement moved them. Never had they remembered any such gathering. Never, could they recall, had there been any endeavor to bring these two classes together, much less any effort to try to mix them.

It was an entirely new experience. Each had been in perfect ignorance concerning the other.

When each had received the Imperial summons to be present, no thought had come concerning his neighbor, the only thoughts that had interested each had been only of a purely personal nature, so that when they had assembled their thoughts were at once directed into an entirely different channel.

However, it was not for long that they were left to their thoughts and unspoken conjectures, for soon after they had assembled and had been assigned to their places, the door leading into the room from back of the raised platform opened and the Emperor Alfred entered with several officers, among them being John of Ainhault and Col. Miron.

Immediately the assembled men rose to their feet and,

saluting, remained standing until the Emperor and his attendants had taken their seats upon the platform.

Upon being directed so to do they resumed their seats, although it brought to them a very new and uncomfortable feeling, for according to an old and established custom and law of the land they were not allowed to sit in the presence of their Emperor; however, after a little, regaining their composure and looking about, they perceived a chair at the left of the Emperor and near to the table which stood immediately in front of the seat occupied by him and which still remained empty.

During the confusion attendant upon the entrance of the Emperor and his party, they had not noticed the entrance by another door back of them of a party of women, deeply veiled in the dress of some religious order, who immediately took their seats without having attracted any attention whatever.

Indeed so deeply were they interested in this new arrangement, that each scarcely so much as gave a thought to his neighbor.

There was no need to enjoin silence where silence already prevailed, but at the first word that issued from the lips of the Emperor the silence seemed intensified a hundred fold.

“My friends?” said he, “I have requested your presence here to-day, as, having to deal with a very peculiar and painful question, I felt that I would like to have you with me to assist, or at least to justify, me in any decision I might find it necessary to render.

For a moment blank astonishment mastered them. When had they ever been asked to assist their Emperor to

render a decision? When had their opinion even been sought? The fact was, that owing to the despotic law of the land they had been only too anxious to hide their opinion, for often to express it was accompanied with more or less danger.

And now they waited, half fearfully lest some expression might be asked of them, but as no expression was asked they began to breath somewhat more easily:

“Bring in the woman,” commanded the Emperor.

A door at the right opened and the guards led in the Countess Zetta, and at a sign from him conducted her to the vacant chair at his left.

Attired in a close-fitting black gown, entirely devoid of ornament, her head covered, her face somewhat pale, she avoided looking at the Emperor, but instead turned and let her gaze fall upon the assembled company of men with a half contemptuous smile upon her beautiful face.

“Gentlemen,” and the Emperor, “it is scarcely necessary to remind you of the treacherous act that destroyed the life of the late Emperor, my father, to explain why I have asked you to be present to-day.”

An angry red burned upon the face of the woman as she shot a quick, vindictive glance toward the speaker, but encountering the steady gaze of those grand gray eyes she quickly turned away.

What did he intend to do? Did he intend to humiliate her before these men? She was of noble, aye, even royal birth, for was not her mother a princess? While some of these men were less than the dirt under her feet.

She was a bold and daring woman. She had played for high stakes, and now she would fight, fight to the bitter

end, for this man was unconsciously giving her an opportunity of which she had not dreamed. This man. Who and what was he? He had been bred in a different land; he already began to show signs of mildness; perhaps he was only weak and timid after all and to that end desired these men to sustain him. If that were so then she had little to fear, for among all these there was not one of the nobles that she did not know almost as well as he knew himself. She had not played her game without knowing her pawns. As for the others, pah! They were too poor and mean even to consider. So she turned toward the Emperor, a half insolent smile upon her face.

But the point wherein she failed was that she did not know the man who was speaking.

"But before taking up that question with you," said he, "I desire to go back a little and take up another matter that may have some considerable bearing upon the question in hand."

Another matter? Something that might have some reference and bearing upon the death of the Emperor Paul at the hands of this woman? Why, what could it be?

These and similar thoughts were passing through the minds of all who were following the speaker closely.

The experience was to them an entirely new one, and one and all were finding themselves intensely interested, although they could not understand whither it all tended.

The expression upon the face of the woman changed. In its place a half-dazed bewildered look came and settled for a moment, then it quickly passed.

"And that matter," continued the speaker, "is in reference to the death of the Archduke Raoul."

The hands of the woman clutched them tightly upon the arms of the chair in which she was seated, while the company gazed at the speaker in open surprise, for what could the death of Raoul have to do with the shooting of the Emperor Paul? But the speaker was going on and every ear was listening that not a syllable even should be lost. The interest was so great.

"Myself," said Alfred, "with John of Ainhault and Col. Miron, rode out upon that mountain road where Raoul met his death a few days since, and Col. Miron will now relate to you what took place upon that journey."

The woman was looking at the speaker with wide open staring eyes, then she quickly recovered herself as Col. Miron rose to his feet and began to speak.

The silence became almost painful as in clean, plain words Col. Miron pictured every detail of that ride; when he came to that part describing the precipice, which he did with minute accuracy, the interest grew.

Then he paused for a moment in his narration, and after a little took up the thread of his tale beginning with the return of the Emperor to the horse left below. Minutely he described every step of the way. Clearly he pictured each scene until all forgot the speaker and saw only the picture he portrayed. So vividly did he describe the end when the horse of the Emperor hurled the unfortunate bay over the cliff to the jagged rocks below, that a low exclamation of horror broke from the lips of his listeners.

The woman seemed to turn to stone.

Slowly the Emperor rose to his feet and turning fixed his gaze upon the white horror-stricken face before him.

Where was all her strength and courage now? An iron hand had caught her and was holding her as in a vice. Her every sense was keenly, painfully alive. The words of this man were pouring in upon her brain with a terribly clear and significant meaning as the truth was driven home.

"Gentlemen," said he, speaking low and impressively, "the same hand that shot the Emperor Paul drove Raoul over the cliff to his death, and that hand is the hand of the woman you see before you. Silence!" said he, as the Countess made as if to speak. Powerless she sunk back, unable to remove her gaze from those grand golden-gray eyes that were burning now with a terribly fascinating fire.

"A plot had been laid," continued he, "to overthrow the present dynasty and seize the throne. A plot as bold and cunning as it was vile and dastardly. This woman had planned, with the aid of Prince Vladimer and others, to marry Raoul, when it would be arranged to remove the Emperor and have Raoul crowned as Emperor and herself as Empress; then at a propitious moment Raoul would follow the Emperor Paul, the Empress would then seize the reins of control and elevate Vladimer, her chief support, to the position as Emperor, and so seize the whole empire. But for the wild outburst of temper which resulted in the death of Raoul, it is reasonable to suppose that the greater part of, if not all of, their plans would ultimately have succeeded."

The Countess seemed upon the verge of collapse. The one brief flash of hope that had appeared had vanished in blackness and defeat, and still that terribly calm voice was going on, only interrupted by an occasional gasp, which betokened the intense feeling of the company.

“I know, that according to the unwritten law of this land, that when the fatal shot was fired that destroyed the life of the Emperor, my father, a hundred swords should have been sheathed in the body of the woman. But, gentlemen, I now wish to appeal to you—,” What was this? Did their ears hear aright? He, their Emperor, was appealing to them? Appealing for the woman who had slain his father? Surely their ears had deceived them! “We are living in a so-called enlightened age, not a barbarous one. We call ourselves Christians, do we not?” The voice was rising in intensity now and sweeping all before it. “Very well, if we are living in such an age then is it not time that we began to employ Christian methods and not the methods of wild, untamed barbarians?”

What was this? What did it mean? They were becoming bewildered; he, the Emperor, was using the very term of them that they in their ignorance had applied to him. And through it all he was holding them, as it were, in the very hollow of his hand. They scarce seemed to have any mind of their own; they were analyzing as with his mind; they were seeing as with his eyes and not their own.

“The Divine Word says, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ then who gave us the right to destroy? Did any of you give life to this woman? Then what right have you to take it away? And if you have not the right, who then, think you, has given me the right to do so?”

“It is scarcely necessary for me to remind you that in the history of this, your land, far, far, back in the past, ages and ages ago, this people elected my father’s house to be your ruling house; from it they chose their ruler, their

Emperor; and through the succeeding years that governorship has descended from father to son until to-day it, with all its duties and burdens, its cares and responsibilities, rests upon my shoulders. But have you stopped to consider, to remember, that the man whom your fathers chose in the beginning, whom they voted the Divine right to become an Emperor, was only a man from among and as themselves, and that to-day the man whom you name your Emperor is only a man as you yourselves are men? A man who needs your assistance and cooperation as much as you need his?

“As the arms of the prophet of old, the ‘chosen one of God,’ were only weak at the strongest and must needs be held aloft that the battle for right might prevail, so remember that the arms of the man, your Emperor, will need to be sustained, as did those of Moses of old, that the right shall be gained and kept; and know that you, one and all, must bear your part in the ‘heat and burden of the day,’ and that you, one and all, are equally responsible with me that right shall prevail at the last.

“So have I chosen you to stand with me and bear your part as men in determining the quantity and quality of mercy and justice we shall deal out to this woman. And to that end let us be sure that our justice is tempered with a full measure of the Divine justice itself.

“But, you say, she has done more; she has destroyed the lives of more than one. Well, be it so. Is there aught in that which makes you any the more accountable? Will you have to answer for her sins? No. Look well to it that you are in position to answer faithfully for your own failings. And, knowing and acknowledging

this, do you think it right to hurl the soul of this woman into the presence of an outraged God without one instant of preparation? Vladimer, who is equally guilty with her, is a wanderer upon the face of the earth to-day. Banished from our land, the ruler of Norwelden, our neighbor, has denied him a refuge. So must he wander on, without a country, without a home, until the vile sinfulness of his soul shall be purged away and he shall come to be once more a man among men before he shall find a rest for the sole of his foot, or a roof under which he may bide for rest.

“And shall we, who call ourselves enlightened, educated, Christian men and God fearing, deny to this woman at least an opportunity to repent her of the evil already done, by committing another and a greater evil, the evil of helping to damn a fellow-soul forever?

“Amid the distant hills of Korenden, as you all know, is the retreat of those holy women known as The Renunciators; their lives one grand renunciation devoted to the uplifting, upbuilding of humanity wherever reached by them. In that retreat, and in the company of these consecrated women,” as he spoke, the veiled woman came and stood at his left, motionless, “let this woman pass the remainder of her days, there to make her peace with her God before it shall be forever too late.”

A great gasp went up from the entire company as the full meaning of the words of the Emperor came to them, for it was well known that this particular order of women, obeying the most rigid laws, was the strictest of any in the known world, so that the change from the wildly gay life she had led, to the incarceration within those stony

walls, would be to the Countess Zetta, worse a hundred fold than death itself.

With a piteous cry the woman flung herself forward to her knees, her arms outstretched toward the Emperor, who interrupted her appeal.

“Countess,” said he coldly, “remember that Socrates welcomed the poisoned herb; that Egypt’s Queen kissed the deadly asp; then you surely will not acknowledge yourself as less noble, less courageous than they and cry for mercy, when such mercy has already been shown to you as has been shown to but few. Remember that a daughter of proud old Carona would blush to sue for pardon.”

Slowly the outstretched arms sank. Slowly the stricken woman rose to her feet, every avenue of hope closed; a forlorn, desolate figure. She had sinned, sinned almost beyond pardon, and in the iron jaws of retribution she was being slowly crushed.

“Gentlemen,” went on the Emperor, “I said that I desired your co-operation. I now appeal to you. You have heard my decision. If there is one voice among you that will rise in defence of this woman, that will declare that I have been unjust or unfair in aught, I pledge you my word I will repeal it.”

Long and silently they looked into the splendid face before them; into those grand gray eyes; then they looked at the bowed form of the woman; then they remembered the crime; then they remembered the punishment; but no man spoke.

CHAPTER XXIV

Days became weeks and the weeks grew into months while the ship of state moved on.

All unknown a new spirit was abroad, a new feeling; as it were a new life had been born; and as a new life it was scarcely to be noticed except as when healing had come to the worn pain-racked body, one day there has come the sense of a greater comfort and from that new hope has risen, new vigorous growth toward strength and life.

So their new Emperor had come among them. He was theirs and yet not theirs, for while he was born of them he was not reared of them, although they scarcely thought of that. He went among them. He sometimes touched them. Perhaps 'twas only the pressure of his hand as he laid it upon their work, mayhap only the glance of his eye, but with it there seemed to come the breath of a new life from some distant unknown land.

Slowly he was coming to be theirs in some strange indefinable way. He had said that he needed them and they needed him. Somehow they were coming to the consciousness that without him they would be desolate; like a ship without a rudder, like a man without a home, and they thought of Vladimer.

Alfred and John of Ainhault were sitting alone. They had been discussing matters of state and for a little time silence had fallen between them. At last the Emperor spoke.

"Cousin of Ainhault, of late I have had a curious

thought that I have desired to express to you; a thought that concerns the future welfare of our house."

John of Ainhault looked questioningly toward the speaker, who continued, "You know that you and I are the last of the direct line of our fathers' house."

"Yes," said the other.

"Now," said Alfred, "as my father's son the crown and scepter of Carona have descended to me and you as the son of my father's brother being the next in line are the heir apparent and Crown Prince. Have you ever considered what would be the position of this great empire, or the condition of its people, were anything to occur that would remove both you and I?"

"You mean?"

"That as love for woman has never entered my life it devolves upon you to select a wife and provide an heir to the throne."

"But, Your Majesty—!"

"John," said the Emperor, "your father was the brother of my father, I am, therefore, no greater than you, so let us, at least in private life, lay aside all those forms and ceremonies and remember that I am only Alfred, so I ask you that you call me by the name she—" he paused, "the name she, my mother, called me." Again ensued a pause, after which he continued. "Also, you know that the nation is again asking why either you or I do not take a wife."

"But, cousin," replied the Archduke, "how can we? Pardon me for introducing an unwelcome topic, but how can we ask a pure woman to wed with either of us?"

"Why! What do you mean?" asked Alfred in astonishment.

"From all you have said and done," was the reply, "I know that you are acquainted with the entire history of our house, a history of which we do not need to boast, especially the life of Philip —"

"And Paul," added Alfred.

The Archduke bowed but vouchsafed no comment.

"John," said Alfred, "you have not forgotten all that took place in that home in Westport," again he paused, then resumed, "when I asked Friend Nathan Arnold how can a clean thing come from an unclean, and you certainly have not forgotten his wonderful reply?"

"No, cousin," was the reply.

"Since that time," said Alfred, "this thought has come to me, and it answers your misgivings at the same time; there is only one person who can lower or degrade you and that person is yourself. I know that the Divine word says that, 'The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children, even unto the third and fourth generation,' but it does not follow that the children must needs entertain or cultivate those sins; while I grant you that it is a true saying, and children do inherit, or as the law says, 'do visit,' the character of their parents, both good and evil, yet can you show me where in the Holy Book we are enjoined to develop or cultivate those sins and shortcomings or even their disagreeable personalities? But rather does not everything about us, every higher trait in us, call upon us to strive to cultivate and develop all that is highest and holiest, all that is purest and best instead?"

"Think you not that I could, if I wished to lower and

degrade myself, emulate the example of Paul, my father? But what of her, my mother? Is my mother and her life and influence of so little consequence that I should ignore it entirely?" And as he spoke his thoughts were of Margaret Raymond, the woman who had reared him; then his thoughts went to that beautiful pictured face in the great salon above. "What a strange world is this in which we are living," continued he. "We see the woman whom we say we love, honor and would cherish; we put her in the highest place man has to offer to woman, the place of the mother of his children, a being one with himself; and then we say, give no heed to her, she is only a woman; but look at me, I am the bright and shining example for you to follow. Odd, isn't it, John? But we are wandering far from the question: we were discussing the question of the succession of our line, and I would ask you to pardon the blunt frankness of my question when I ask if you, my cousin, have yet not seen the woman whom you would make your wife?"

"Alfred," said the Archduke, now addressing him by his name for the first time, "you have been fair and honest with me and I will be fair and honest with you. You are, as you say, the son of my father's brother and the same as myself, as you made plain in your clear exposition of our exact position as men among men. Yet you are my Emperor, and for the good of the greater number, I am bound to obey the oath of allegiance, I swore to you, and so, replying to your question, I will say, that I have looked upon the woman whom my soul cries out for, but she is as far removed from me as is the heaven above the earth."

"Cousin mine," said Alfred gently, "I do not wish to

pry into your inner life, but, if it is possible, can you not tell me who this woman may be and why you deem her unattainable? Where dwells this woman, and why is she so far removed from you? Can you not tell me of her?"

"Tell you of her?" said John of Ainhault, a peculiar inflection in his voice, "I fear me that the tongue of John of Ainhault is but poorly equipped to tell you of her, for she is fair beyond women; tall, with eyes of deep, unfathomable, velvety blue. Her hair like spun gold and worn like a coronal, adorns her beautiful head as never yet diadem crowned the head of Queen or Empress. Her voice, the sweetest I have ever yet heard and even now I hear her as when, with her hands in mine, she gave her charge to me."

"Her charge to you?" said Alfred, rising to his feet, his face pale with a deep inward emotion. What did John of Ainhault mean? Why did the past roll dimly up before him?

"Yes," said the Archduke rising and facing him, a wistful look upon his fine face, "her charge to me,—‘he is your charge from me,’ Alfred began to tremble, ‘and one day I shall demand a faithful accounting of your trust.’"

For a moment there was no sound between them, then Alfred stepped forward and laying his hands upon the shoulders of John of Ainhault he gazed long and earnestly into the fine brown eyes before him as if trying to read the soul of the man, then, in a low tone he spoke, as his eyes grew misty with tenderness, "John, you are speaking of ——"

"Margaret Raymond," was the low spoken reply.

"My sister!" said Alfred almost in a whisper. Then, dropping his hands, he stepped back as he drew himself to

his full height and spoke in a stern voice, a half merry twinkle showing in his grand gray eyes. "Sir, are not your aspirations high that you desire the sister of an Emperor to be your wife?"

"Cousin! What do you mean?" said the Archduke half startled.

"John," said the Emperor, holding out his hand which the other grasped firmly, "and she, my little sister, my little Madge, is the woman who is so far removed from you?" Then his attitude changed suddenly. "Listen, Sir!" said he sternly. "I am your Emperor, and in me is all authority vested, and you, you sir, have offended us; yes, sir, offended us deeply; therefore you are banished; do you follow me? You are banished from our Imperial presence and from our land; and you shall journey at once to that land, and if you bring not this woman back with you as a willing and happy ransom for you, you shall return no more to our shores or to our presence. Silence! Sir," as the Archduke endeavored to speak. "Silence! And now make you ready to depart at once, for if you are found within our borders after twelve hours ——"

"But, Cousin," interrupted John of Ainhault, "my mother!"

"Your mother!" said Alfred. "Wait! We will confer with her. Come!" said he holding out his hand. "Come with me!"

Hastily quitting the apartment they hurried along the great corridor like a pair of mischievous school-boys, and made their way by a small postern door from the palace without having been seen by any one.

By avoiding the more frequented paths they reached the stables unseen.

Alfred whistled and Golden Betty answered from her stall. Darting under the rail, he caught her saddle and trappings and swiftly harnessed her with his own hands while John of Ainhault, now thoroughly imbued with the same wild spirit, was doing the same in an adjoining stall.

As the Archduke led his mount forth, he stopped with surprise as he beheld his companion. Where was the quiet, half-stern, half-sad man he had known during the days that had elapsed since he first beheld him in that distant land? Before him was standing the glowing man of the plains. The handsome, flushed face, the grand golden-gray eyes that flashed and glowed; the small riding cap pressed far back from the face showing that mass of golden-brown hair, the splendid supple figure as he swung himself in the saddle as light as a bird. He fairly caught his breath.

"Hurry! Hurry!" said Alfred, "before they catch us!"

Quickly John of Ainhault sprang up and like an arrow from the bow the two horses shot from the great stable.

At the sound of the running horses, the grooms, who were at their meal, rushed out just in time to see the two runaways riding madly down the great avenue to the gate. Consternation seized them, and this almost grew into a panic when they learned that there had been no one on duty when the Emperor and Crown Prince had suddenly taken the horses and made off with them.

This half-wild, half-mad dash had in it so much of the joyous, free rush with which he had hurled himself into the battle with those half-wild cattle of the plains, that by the time they drew rein at the entrance to Castle Ainhault, the half-sad, serious man had completely vanished and only the man of the wonderful new land remained.

A groom took their horses and led them away as they mounted the steps to the entrance hall.

Learning that the Archduchess was in the great salon, John of Ainhault sent a page to her with the request that the Emperor and himself desired to meet her in her private apartments.

The messenger returned shortly, saying that the Archduchess would be pleased if they would proceed thither and that she would join them later."

"Your Highness," said Alfred, after they had escorted her to a seat and had themselves taken seats before her, "I have come to plead a cause."

"A cause?" repeated she, looking into that splendid face and becoming somewhat bewildered by the flash of those grand gray eyes, as she noted the excitement that moved the two men before her; "What cause? Whose cause?"

"The cause of John of Ainhault," replied Alfred, not entirely repressing the smile that lit up his handsome face.

"I hardly know how to understand you, sir. What cause of John of Ainhault is so great that it must needs an Emperor to plead it?" said she turning to her son and holding out her hand as she spoke.

The Archduke moved his seat nearer to his mother and taking the hand held out to him, held it close pressed in his.

"John of Ainhault," said Alfred sternly, "desires to wed the sister of an Emperor.

"Sir, you speak in riddles," said she, "please explain."

"Gladly your Highness, but be patient with me," said Alfred as he leaned his arm lightly upon a small table near him, "for I must ask you to go with me upon a strange journey in a far country."

For a moment the Archduchess gazed fixedly into that face before her and was somewhat startled at the peculiar look that came over it. Then the face and form of the man before her faded from view. Her surroundings were as if they had not been. Only the hand clasped in the warm, firm clasp of her son seemed to bind her to the present. She seemed to be traversing a cool, leafy wood. Her chest heaved at the pressure of the cool, resilient air about her. Then, to her startled ears there came a wonderful burst of song, and involuntarily she leaned forward as if fearing to lose one note of that Divine melody.

Now a shudder shook her at the vile discord that dispelled the bright radiance of the morning. Her heart ached for the beautiful, barefoot boy that came out before her.

Breathless, almost, she followed every scene that was shown; every picture that was portrayed.

When the wonderful story Mary Beaton told was repeated with startling fidelity of word and detail, again she felt the pressure of that splendid child-form upon her own breast as when they told her that she had borne a son. The story was going on and suddenly she began to feel an almost Holy awe steal over her as she saw that wonderful Quaker woman whose character as unfolded by this peerless narra-

tor ascended to such heights as she had not thought it possible for mortal to attain unto.

After the violent and sickening upheaval that had broken up the little circle, the new home as created by this woman, became, in her eyes, almost a sanctuary.

Step by step she followed that little trio as day by day it moved forward. The fair-haired, beautiful sister and daughter became to her a living presence and unconsciously her soul began to yearn with a mighty yearning for the child of that other woman.

As in a dream she heard the words, "that man is yourself," and at the scene that followed, her head was laid upon the shoulder of her son, as his strong arm went out and around her.

At that, the voice of the narrator nearly broke and stopped, then after an almost imperceptible pause, he continued. As he repeated the words, "You are my brother in the sight of God just as truly as if you had been made flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood. I am Margaret, the little baby Margaret that you loved so. I am the sister mother gave to you. You are the son God gave to her. You are hers, you are mine and nothing else matters," the veil dropped from her eyes and she saw clearly now where she had seen only dimly before. The words, "God's ways are not as man's ways," came to her with a new significance and meaning. And as the full meaning of this wonderful tale became clear to her, she began to come into a clear understanding of what it must have cost this man, Alfred Raymond, their Emperor, to give up the land and home of his love and come to a land and home that had but a spent and broken life to offer in return.

She had fought desperately with her son when he had striven to throw off the worn, deadly shackles of the old and purposed to throw in his destinies with this man in the new. And in this new a woman dwelt, prepared, it seemed by God's own hand, to be the mate of the highest and noblest. How was it he, their Emperor, had called her? "The sister of an Emperor." Ah, was it not literally true? For did it not seem that this man had been peculiarly set apart and kept against the day when he should be brought, as it were by the hand of God itself, to the work prepared for him to do?

"You are hers, you are mine; I am the sister mother gave to you; you are the son God gave to her." Her vision suddenly became clear. She put away the arm that held her and rose slowly to her feet, her face lighted with a smile.

Alfred and the Archduke rose with her.

Turning to the Emperor she said, "Your Majesty, you said that he —" indicating her son.

"Is banished from our presence and from our land until he shall bring her, my sister, a willing and happy ransom for his return to our favor," replied Alfred.

Slowly she turned to the Archduke John and spoke: "You have heard, and if you bring not this woman to me as your lawfully wedded wife before God and man you are no true son of mine."

CHAPTER XXV

The entrance door of the old Raymond house opened and Margaret Raymond came out upon the old-fashioned "stoop" and stood for a moment, a distant, preoccupied look upon her face.

Since coming to her father's house and living among his people the strong characteristics of that splendid sect had come forth and clothed her as with a garment.

Her dress of a soft, gray material, falling in simple, straight folds, seemed to enhance the fine curves of her slender, graceful form; the closely fitting sleeves ending in snowy white bands that turned back at the shapely wrists disclosed hands of wonderful beauty and fairness. From her shoulders hung a long gray cloak that swept almost to her feet and being thrown back disclosed the white silken facing. Over her fair golden hair was drawn a close-fitting hood of the same silken-gray material as the dress and cloak, with a broad black satin band about the face; the gray silken ties of which were left to swing back over the shoulders.

Her exquisite, madonna-like face might have served as a model for the face of Clotho herself, so beautiful, so exquisitely fair was she.

Her cheeks were delicately tinted as the sweetbriar rose; her eyes large, and of a deep, velvety blue, were shaded by long curling lashes; her hair which she often wore in girlish fashion, was plaited in two great braids and hung far down below her waist.

It seemed almost as if she had stepped down from some

rare old picture of our forefathers' days, so quaint, so delicate, so beautiful she appeared.

With a slow, graceful step she went down the high steps to the garden below, when, catching the sound of a wagon being driven rapidly down the road, she turned to look.

Standing near the rugged body of a fine old elm with the sunlight filtering down upon her she was indeed a picture to gladden the eye of man.

At least so thought the man who had descended from the carriage that had stopped near the front gate.

She had stopped to pluck a late-growing pink rose and that one dash of pale color against the black and white and gray, produced a most startling effect.

At the sight of the man standing before her, a rose that vied with the rose in her hand appeared in her cheek, then slowly faded leaving a white one in its place.

For a moment she was too startled to leave the place where she stood, then dropping the rose she held out both hands.

"You!" broke from her lips.

"I," was the simple reply. And John of Ainhault bowed low and touched those beautiful hands to his lips.

"You have come from him?" said she, her breath coming in little gasps.

"I have come from him," was the simple reply. Before this slender young girl, John of Ainhault found himself almost helpless and unable to do more than to repeat her words.

"And you bring a message?" said she eagerly.

"I bring a command — ah — a — message," stammered he, then stopped.

The roses again glowed in her cheeks for he was still holding her hands closely clasped in his.

Awkwardly he released them and then to hide his confusion, bent down to pick up the rose that lay at her feet.

"He is well?" questioned she.

"He is well," was the reply.

John of Ainhault flushed; never had he felt so awkward and uncomfortable before. In the presence of the women of his own land he had experienced only indifference and weariness, but in the presence of this fair-haired, beautiful girl he felt almost afraid.

They had commanded him to bring this woman as a willing happy captive. Willing and happy. John of Ainhault could scarcely repress a groan. They had commanded him to bring her. A dark flush rose to his face. Did they think that this was some prehistoric age, and that he could come and bear away at his sweet will?

All the soul of him yearned for her, cried out for her; yet he was as powerless before her as if the rulers of this great land had been warned of his mission and had thrown the entire force of their wonderful protective power about her.

Now she was speaking, she was telling of the many incidents that had transpired. He was confirming them. The power of the press. It was so great, and she had read so eagerly, but she wanted to hear it from his own lips for he had been with the dearly loved one whom she still called her brother.

They were seated now; how it was accomplished he was not quite certain, but he could look into that beautiful face and so he was content.

He had not passed a dozen words with her before new delights were rising up to meet him.

Her mind was truly as beautiful as her face, but the daughter of such a mother, and the sister of such a brother, she could not be otherwise.

“But this command that you spoke of,” said she, “you have not told me it; and from my brother; what can it be? Will you not tell me what it is?”

And immediately he fell into a great confusion. He rose to his feet. He would come again, that is if she would allow him. He must go now; and so he tore himself away carrying the rose she had plucked with him.

And he came the next day, and still many days and the whole story was told. Little details; half forgotten incidents, but still he would not tell of the command.

“What was it that caused the breach between the Emperor and the Archduke Raoul, and which finally led up to the present situation?” she asked of him one day.

“The Emperor had commanded Raoul to be prepared to marry as negotiations were then under way to effect an alliance with another royal house,” answered he.

“Negotiations!” said she with a little shudder. “Alliance! Why? What a very unpleasant way your people must have ——”

“Haven’t they,” said he interrupting her. “And,” said he quite vehemently, “it is almost as bad to-day.”

“Almost as bad!” exclaimed she. “Why what do you mean?”

“The Emperor has commanded me to wed ——”

“Commanded you! To wed?”

“To wed the woman he and I have ——”

"Sir," said she, rising to her feet and speaking sternly, "do you mean to tell me that my brother would so far forget the training of a lifetime, as to countenance ——?"

"Listen! Dear lady," said he interrupting her as she was about to turn away, "and I will try to explain. Do not go, but hear me out."

Slowly she sank into her seat with half averted face.

"Go on," said she, "I will listen."

At which he related to her the interview that had taken place between the Emperor and himself, finishing with that last command of the Emperor and his mother, yet without having given any inkling as to whom the women might be.

"And the woman," said Margaret, "does she know?"

"No," was the reply.

"Then what will you do to effect a return to your country? You say that you are banished and that the Emperor requires that you bring the woman as an hostage, so to that end will you seize the women and bear her away? For that seems to be the custom of your people."

"No!" exclaimed he, "a thousand times, no!" For if she come not to me freely, willingly, of her love for me ——"

"Do'st think that she will come unasked, sir?" was the rather startling and disconcerting question.

He looked at her with amazement, but her face was averted.

"No," said he in answer to her query.

"Then you have already asked her? Or," as he shook his head negatively, "your ambassadors have already waited upon her and expressed the wishes of the Emperor and yourself, in the great honor conferred by you upon her?"

“No! No!” he exclaimed quite vehemently. “Neither the Emperor or myself would approve of any such barbarous acts; and I am here as my own ambassador to plead my own cause with the woman that I love.”

“Here!” said she in a startled tone of voice. But,” resumed she proudly and firmly, her face pale, “the princes of a royal house do not wed with the daughters of the American people, nor do the true women of America sell their birthright for a ‘mess of pottage.’”

“True, dearest lady,” said he, “and if she come not to me as my lawfully wedded wife before God and man, John of Ainhault will go alone and unwed to his grave.”

“And this woman,” said she speaking low, “tell me of her.”

“She came before me as an angel of mercy and light,” John of Ainhault was pleading his own cause now and with the scene which he was portraying before him, he needed no ambassador. “Stopping not to consider her own sorrow and loss, she gave fully and freely of herself and her great love to comfort and succor another; and I looking, saw and loved this woman as methinks man never loved woman before. With her would be Heaven upon earth, without her will all be dark and cold and despair. Miss Raymond, Margaret,” said he, unable longer to restrain the great emotion that mastered him, “I am only a poor stumbler at the best; honeyed phrases halt but lamely upon my lips, my tongue stammers but poorly and I can only say, I love you. Will you be my wife?”

“I!” said she. “It is I you are commanded to bring as ——”

“A willing and happy ransom,” interrupted he catching

her hands and drawing her up to him. "Margaret, my pearl among women, will you look into my eyes and tell me that you do not love me? Ah, the look there," said he, "has given the answer your lips refuse to speak."

A beautiful smile irradiated her exquisite face as she murmured, "You are banished, sir, and I could not think to keep you an exile from your home."

John Raymond performed the most graceful and gracious act of his whole life when, after the civil ceremony that the Archduke had insisted upon had been performed, the little company had assembled in the quaint, old-fashioned parlor where Friend Nathan Arnold recited the simple service that wed his daughter Margaret to the Archduke of Ainhault.

At the words "Who gives this woman away?" he asked Jim and Mary Beaton to stand in the place of himself and the mother who had gone on before and do this for her and themselves.

Before the great liner steamed into port, John of Ainhault asked his beautiful young wife to put on the same garments she had worn when he saw her first in her father's garden.

The Archduchess Miriam met them at the great entrance, she had dismissed all of the attendants and with her own fair hands opened the door to admit the wife of her son. Long and earnestly she gazed into the fair face before her, then in like manner as she had opened her home she opened the door of her heart as she took that slender, gray-clad figure in close embrace.

A little later the Emperor came, but only the man Alfred Raymond went in to the young Archduchess; when

they returned to the others, there were traces of tears upon her face, while under the grand gray eyes of the man, rested that shadow like a bruise upon the fair flesh.

Years rolled on and the cup of John of Ainhault seemed full to overflowing. His fair young wife was indeed a blessing. Four beautiful sons she bore him, and the people idolized her almost as much as they did their Emperor.

One day someone asked the second boy, whom they had called for his father, whom he loved the most, his father or his mother, or what was the difference between his father and his mother? "Well," was the reply, "father, well he's a splendid fellow, and he's father; but mother, well, she's mother." And the question was answered.

Love for woman never entered the heart of Alfred Raymond, the Emperor; all the heart of him seemed to have gone into the grave with his foster-mother.

He was a being set apart, for as love begets love, so the love this people had given to his mother, the noble Charlotte, seemed now transferred to her son, and so the nation became his bride. For her he wrought and strove and in time he won her, won her through the power of love, for love lifts and moves the great universe, levels all ranks, lifts all burdens and carries us onward, upward to the perfect love itself.

"Though now we see as through a glass, darkly, yet comes there a day when we shall see face to face; though now we know but in part, then shall we know, even as we are known."

EPILOGUE

Moonlight white and clear bathed all the scene in a pure, opaline light.

Against the deep, velvety blackness of the woods, the snow gleamed frostily white.

Within the sitting room of the old Beaton home all was peace and quiet.

Time with his relentless march had laid his frosty hand upon Jim Beaton's head, and the locks above his ruddy face sparkled in the glow of the firelight almost as the hoar-frost without in the moonlight.

His splendid figure still retaining its wonderful vigor and strength, resembled nothing so much as some grand old oak that has come at last to full and mellow perfection.

Mary Beaton was the same sweet, comely woman whom we first knew; only a little more ample. Her pale yellow hair, streaked with gray, still curled and nestled about her face, making her look, as she said, "perfectly silly." Dressed in a neat black dress with a knit collar pinned with an old-fashioned brooch-pin that had been her mother's, she was indeed good and comfortable to look upon.

"Guess you must be 'xpectin' comp'ny, haint you mother?" said Jim.

"Comp'ny! No. Why?" asked she.

"Y'u seem t' be quite dressed up," was the reply.

"Just slipped in this old bomb'zine dress, I don't call this much dres'd up. 's fur 's comp'ny's concerned, guess there won't be any one stirrin' out t'night," said she.

“ ’tis purty tol’ble smart,” was his reply in reference to the weather.

Mary Beaton knitted away in silence for some minutes while Jim slowly perused his paper.

Presently through the keen, frosty silence came the sound of sleigh-bells.

“ Somebody’s movin’,” said he, laying down his paper and leaning forward to listen.

Through the keen, frosty air the sharp clash of bells was greatly intensified.

Clearly they could hear the rapid beat of the iron-shod hoofs upon the hard icy road.

“ Why! They’re stoppin’ here!” exclaimed Mrs. Beaton.

After a moment they could hear the firm tread of some one approaching the house by the side path, every step ringing out clear by the sharp crunch upon the frosty path.

“ Wonder who it can be?” said she as Jim Beaton laid aside his spectacles and started for the door.

As he made his way through the dim old inner hall, he could hear the footsteps approaching the side door, then shortly someone rapped.

Opening the door he saw a tall, heavily coated man standing before him who asked in a low voice if, “ Mr. James Beaton still lived there?”

“ He does,” was the reply. “ Won’t you come in?”

The stranger stepped inside and after Mr. Beaton had closed the door, followed him as he returned to the sitting room.

Mary Beaton remained seated, her work held half sus-

pended in her hand, and looked eagerly toward the two men as they entered the room.

That the stranger was tall, almost as tall as Jim, she could see, but his heavy collar was still drawn well up, almost to the fur cap which he had not yet removed, also a heavy paper shade was upon the lamp so that the man's face remained in a deep gloom.

The stranger, turning half away, loosed his great coat and dropped it upon a chair, then he drew off the cap and laid it upon the coat.

As he turned toward her Mary Beaton lifted her hand to lay her work upon the table; as she did so it struck against the lamp-shade and tipped it sharply up, thereby causing the full light of the lamp to fall upon the man.

Grasping the arms of her chair tightly she sat spell-bound. Where had she seen that face before? That mass of golden-brown hair, now so tossed and disordered from the wrench of the cap?

Somewhere she remembered a richly glowing, boyish face crowned with wind-tossed hair, now she was looking into a pair of grand, golden-gray eyes, and the look there was the look of the star-eyed child who had lain upon her heart years and years ago. The smile that met her startled questioning gaze was the smile of the boy whose rich laughter had left a strain of music in her soul that never would end.

"Jim! Jim!" cried she shrilly as she sprang to her feet. "It's Alfred! Alfred Raymond! Boy! Boy!" called she as she flung herself forward into the arms held out to her, her lips refusing further speech.

Jim Beaton grew slowly white beneath the tan of his

ruddy face as the truth came slowly home to him. Upon his great heart, within his mighty arms he felt again the ecstatic quiver of a little boyish form; then he stepped forward and folded them both to him and his mild blue eyes filled with tears as his face pressed against that mass of golden-brown hair; and though from his lips there came no speech, from his great heart there went up a prayer of thanksgiving, that God had heard and had brought back the feet that had made glad music, once more. For the little frail hands of their soul-child had reached out, out across the great sea, and, by the power of love, had drawn and drawn, and the little bared, white, dew-kissed feet had led and led, until they led the child-man, Alfred Raymond, into His Land, His Country, His Home, into The Kingdom of Love.

M Y L A N D .
M Y C O U N T R Y .
M Y H O M E .

PRICE \$1.35 POSTPAID
MAIL ORDERS ONLY

ADDRESS

C. F. WILLIAMS & SON

36 BEAVER ST.

ALBANY, N. Y.

LBJe'24

—*ma*

Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing Agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date:



MAR

1996

BOOKKEEPER

PRESERVATION TECHNOLOGIES, INC.

1114 William Flinn Highway

Glenshaw, PA 15116-2657

412-486-1161

NS

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00022335042